

Sunday - February 28, 2010
Pastor - Rev. Paula P. Werner
Sermon - **The Chores Chart**

Luke 13:31-34 *“May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be formed by your grace for you are our Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.”*

I spent some time this week making up a chore chart for my two granddaughters..... jobs they need to do daily and weekly. I now know there are many—you'd be surprised how many-- websites which offer clip art to use on home-made charts, as well as actual chores charts – you can order, but I couldn't see spending \$17.95, when the girls and I could make a chart on a poster board. I think it's only fair to have them understand what is expected of them. Obviously, now I realize I need to come up with a reward system for their completing their tasks, and some system of consequences if they do not.

Most parents want their children to learn responsibility, self discipline, kindness, how to make good decisions, how to follow the godly way. We want to protect them, guide them, shape them, lead them to faith. We want the best for our children. We want to protect them from harm, but as they grow, especially into teenage, we cannot stop them from making mistakes. We can offer them our standards, morals, best practices, but we cannot force them to accept them. Yet at some point we have to stand back, let them strike out on their own and see what happens. Our heartbreak comes when they turn from our teachings and go astray and make bad decisions. Then, I think we get a sense of what God, as parent of us all, must feel when you and I make poor decisions, choose the wrong, turn away from the way God has laid out for us. God does not force us to live our lives his way. He could, but that would be taking away our freedom of choice, and God loves us enough to give us freedom even to be evil and choose wrong. In this way, we are not so much different from our children, and all of us are not so different from the people of Israel so long ago in Jesus' time. God desires us to choose good and relationship with him. And, there will be a time when God will judge how we have chosen to live.

God does not just leave us out there to flail about, with no guidance. God has given us Jesus as our model of a life well lived that we might pattern our own life about. I've been putting together lots of jigsaw puzzles lately. I'm not particularly good at them, so I really appreciate those of you who work on puzzles of thousands of pieces. But I can at least put together simple puzzles IF I have the box cover to look at, showing the picture of the puzzle. God knew we needed an example for our lives; God came in human form—Jesus to be a picture for the jigsaw puzzle of our lives.

As Luke writes this part of the story about Jesus, Jesus has been going through one town and village after another, teaching, as he makes his way to Jerusalem..... Jerusalem, where he will be betrayed and crucified.

Please read along in your Bibles with me as we read and consider these events in Jesus' life: read 13:31 *"At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."* Does it surprise you to hear that some Pharisees were concerned about Jesus' safety? We so often talk about the Pharisees (one branch of Judaism) as being caught up in legalisms, following the letter of the law but not the spirit. And often the gospels do portray the Pharisees in conflict with Jesus, trying to trap Jesus into saying the wrong thing. So we often figure that the Pharisees were the natural born enemies of Jesus.

However, maybe this isn't the only way we can think of the Pharisees --- maybe there are a few of them who actually are looking out for Jesus for all the right reasons. In the gospel of Luke the Pharisees are given a more sympathetic portrayal. On 3 occasions in Luke, Jesus is invited to dinner at the home of a Pharisee, so obviously not all Pharisees were his enemies. We also know that Nicodemus was a Pharisee who came to Jesus by night and said, "We know you are a rabbi come from God." And it was another Pharisee, Joseph of Arimathea, who took Jesus' body after the crucifixion and laid it in a tomb.

So these Pharisees may well have been friends with Jesus, looking out for his safety from Herod. There were several rulers named Herod.... This Herod was Herod Antipas and he had John the Baptist beheaded because it was the wish of his step-daughter. So it's reasonable for these Pharisees friendly to Jesus to be concerned about Herod's wish to kill Jesus.

Let's return to our scripture: v. 32. *"He.. meaning Jesus, said to them, 'Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.'" Jesus referring to Herod as a fox, is not a compliment. The fox, in Jesus' day, was not thought of as sly and cunning but as cowardly and thieving, stealing what it could, and running away when confronted. Jesus was referring to Herod as being cowardly behind his façade of power.*

"Listen, I am casting out demons... and performing cures today, and tomorrow,....Jesus is saying that he has work to do. Then he says, "on the third day." --- this has a double meaning which the listeners to this gospel would have understood. The third day..... was his day of resurrection, that would certainly be the FINISH of his overall work here on earth – being the sacrifice for humanity's sins.

v. 33 & 34 *“Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.”*
Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!

Jesus is signaling that he is obedient to God..... he knows what his mission is, today, tomorrow and the next.... He MUST be on his way..... he is not subverted from accomplishing the work God has set before him. Jesus does not need the chores chart that children and youth do..... or the “to do” list you and I make out. He knows --- has internalized – the plans and life that God has designed for him. And he is not diverted from it.

Jerusalem is the wondrous city that holds the temple. Jesus loves the temple where he worships and teaches, but the city Jerusalem, is symbolic of the people who turn against the prophets of God. That was true for the prophets of Old Testament time, and is true for Jesus.

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets”..... are the words of sadness, of lamentation. Jesus then offers this image of what his job is..... his chore chart:

verse 34 b *“How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing.”*

Jesus uses one of the more unusual images for himself or God – we are used to images of God as protector, shepherd, rock, refuge, king, warrior.....but hen?

This is a feminine image, no doubt about it. It does help to remind us that God is without gender, being neither male nor female, that the only way we can talk about God is through using images which are language or visually bound. Hen.....a mother chicken. Jesus is saying, NOT that he is the rooster proudly strutting through the barnyard, no, he is comparing himself to the hen..... because you see, he is on his way to Jerusalem. He is on his way to completing his “chores chart” He is going to offer himself as a sacrifice, just as a mother hen does.

You know, when there is a chicken hawk around, the mother hen gathers her chicks under her wing. With a furious fuss she squawks til her brood is safe underneath her wings. She fluffs out her wings and protects her chicks with her own body. The chicken hawk dives and the old hen turns her body toward him Spreading her wings even wider to protect her children. She offers herself as a sacrifice to the hawk, keeping her chicks safe.

Jesus is foreshadowing that he will be the sacrifice. He too will open his arms and take on the burden of sacrifice for our lives.

Jesus is saying, "I MUST be on my way....." I have work to do. Jesus' work is the ultimate chores chart. He is taking on the sins of the world. He is offering himself as the sacrifice so that the entire world --- then and now -- might be reconciled to God. "I must be on my way..., " Jesus said.

Do you have a "MUST" in your life? Is there a passion, a vision, a mission that defines your life? Is there something you MUST do --- something that propels you, energizes you, calls to you. What MUST you do? What is it that gives you purpose and value and strength? The great leaders of history have had a sense of purpose, a "must do" task that gave them purpose, drive, motivation for their life. This month, February, we celebrated President's day -- a day when we have reflected on the lives and mission of our first president, George Washington, who led this fledgling nation and the presidency of Abraham Lincoln who kept us together through the biggest confrontation and split we have known as the United States of America. The "MUST" that drove each of these leaders led to a better life for you and me.

We need to discover the MUSTS in our own living. What is it for which you are willing to take risks? What is it that can open you to failure, that invites you to push your comfort zones? Are there causes and people in which you believe so fiercely that you can withstand fear and mistakes and struggle along the way? Maybe you have a vision for this church that takes us to a new level and moves us to a future outside the lines. Maybe you have a passion for justice -- that motivates you beyond the prejudice and lethargy and politics of our resistant world. Whatever it is, today Jesus models for us and mandates for us -- - a sense of MUST.

Yet, Jesus gives us a choice. He invites us to gather under his arms --- to accept the grace and freedom and truth of the Christian life. Still, Jesus knows that our human heart can be hard and unresponsive: Jesus has said in this passage: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing."

How about you..... are you willing? Are you willing to accept the gift of grace, forgiveness, and sacrifice that Jesus offers? Jesus said of Jerusalem, "you were not willing" to accept me as your prophet. Do you accept Jesus? How would we know that? What about your life is so different, so changed, that we can tell that you are willing to accept Jesus as prophet, preacher, savior?

What is on your lifelong chore chart or "to do" list -- it is truly worthy of your time, your life?