

First Trinity Lutheran  
February 24, 2013  
Luke 13: 31-35

### **Don't Give Up**

When he was seven years old, his family was forced out of their home on a legal technicality, and he had to work to help support them. At age nine, his mother died. At 22, he lost his job as a store clerk. He wanted to go to law school, but his education wasn't good enough. At 23, he went into debt to become a partner in a small store. At 26, his business partner died, leaving him a huge debt that took years to repay. At 28, after courting a young woman for four years, he asked her to marry him, she said no. At 37, on his third try he was elected to Congress, but two years later, he failed to be reelected. At 41, his four-year-old son died. At 45, he ran for the Senate and lost. At 47, he failed as the vice-presidential candidate. At 49, he ran for the Senate again, and lost. At 51, he was elected president of the United States. His name, Abraham Lincoln, a man many consider the greatest leader the country ever had, but you wouldn't know that from his past failures.

It is not easy to keep going, when everything looks like a failure. It is not easy to keep going when everything seems to be going against you. It is definitely not easy, when everything and everybody tells you to give up... that you are wasting your time... that it is - no use. It is not easy if you are the only person who thinks that what you are doing is the right thing. This is what I think about when reading today's text from Luke. Looking at Jesus in this text we see that he is trying to be stopped once again. This time by some Pharisees, and we don't know if they were friends or enemies, yet they do warn Jesus that Herod wants to kill him.

Jesus was faced with many obstacles in his ministry. Those who disliked him

constantly threw tests at him, constantly looked to trap him, and constantly questioned his authority. Those who loved him pressed down on him like the paparazzi on a superstar actor, making it impossible at times for him to even move. Even his friends... his closest followers - the disciples, were often confused about what he taught and said some of the dumbest things when he tried to sit down and actually teach them. Yet Jesus remains focused on his mission. He doesn't say ok ok... enough already... I will turn back? He doesn't say I've had enough of these tests, enough of the spotlight, enough of these disciples who can't seem to tie their own shoes without help?

Despite this pressure Jesus comes out with some colorful language. To the threat of Herod Jesus says "Go tell that fox!" Now, fox in those days was understood differently than it is in today's context. Today, we hear fox and we think sly, smart, or crafty. Back then, it was known... as an animal of complete and total insignificance. Despite all the efforts to stop him, despite all the obstacles in his way, despite all the words of wisdom that bid him not to go on... he kept his heart and mind focused on his mission.

Some of you might be thinking well of course he could do it ... this is JESUS we are talking about. Of course he is able to persevere. We are not Jesus; we are not even in the same zip code as Jesus." To this I would like to respond by sharing with you an old news story about the "Little Satellite That Could!"

"In 1972, NASA launched the exploratory space probe Pioneer 10. According to an article in Time magazine the satellite's primary mission was to reach Jupiter, photograph the planet and its moons, and beam data to earth about Jupiter's magnetic field, radiation belts, and atmosphere. Scientists regarded this as a bold plan; for at that time no earth satellite had ever gone beyond Mars, and they feared that asteroids would destroy the satellite before it would even reach its target.

“But Pioneer 10 accomplished its mission and much, much more. Swinging past the giant planet in November 1973, Jupiter’s immense gravity hurled Pioneer 10 at a higher rate of speed toward the edge of the solar system. At one billion miles from the earth, Pioneer 10 passed Saturn. At some two billion miles, it hurtled past Uranus; Neptune at nearly three billion miles; Pluto at almost four billion miles. “And despite that immense distance, Pioneer 10 continued to beam back radio signals to scientists on Earth. ‘Perhaps most remarkable is that those signals came from an 8-watt transmitter, which radiates about as much power as a bedroom night light, and took more than nine hours to reach Earth.’

“The Little Satellite That Could was not qualified to do what it did. Engineers designed Pioneer 10 with a useful life of just three years. But it kept going and going. By simple longevity, its tiny 8-watt transmitter radio accomplished more than anyone thought possible.

I am not trying to equate our lives to an eight watt nightlight or to a space probe, but the point is that when we offer ourselves in service to the Lord God can work even through our weaknesses or lack of abilities. God cannot work, however, through someone who quits.”

There are several amazing things happening here at First Trinity and St Matthew’s. Each and every one of you continues to contribute to the life and ministry that happens here and that happens outside these walls. There are several of you who are even going the extra mile, contributing that extra hour... or two... or four. You respond to the challenge and dig in with both feet. But I expect there is more than a good share of obstacles... that feeling that “I just can’t do this! Or I’m just too busy; I have so many

things to do. Perhaps others even tell you that being involved in a church is a complete waste of time and resources.

My message today is not to lose hope... not to give up if things aren't happening or going exactly as you would like them to. Don't let obstacles stand in the way of what God is calling you to do. Keep at your calling, and know that God is using you... and that even though you may not see the results of your work - something is happening.

Our theme this lent is Squandered Love and Abundant Grace. This reading from Luke is a good example of Jesus' love for the people but many reject him, even plot to kill him, squandering His love, but Jesus does not give up – he presses on with his mission giving us abundant grace. History would be much different today if Abraham Lincoln or Martin Luther King, for example, would have succumbed to all the negative pressure and have given up. We live in a world today where much in our society needs improvement, and it is within our ability to do something about it, to make a difference, whether it is caring for the earth, preventing poverty, or reducing community violence, just to name a few. We may not always see success or positive immediate results for our efforts ... but be encouraged... knowing that even as Christ's ministry was fulfilled... the ministry that you and I are called to do will eventually produce the good works that God has called us to do. It may indeed not happen for us the first time... but it may take many many times. Know that God is working through you, know that the result of your labor is still out there waiting to be fulfilled, and know that even though everything seems to be working against you... if you remain faithful Lord will always be working with you.

Amen.