**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

 **“My Way”**

Pastor Aaron Reseburg

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*Luke 13:31-35*

Being called a fox was not a compliment in 1st century Palestine. They are certainly clever, but they aren’t necessarily the kind of clever that you would want a person to be. Foxes are clever in their ability to survive; they will do whatever it takes to survive, and they don’t take unnecessary risks. That was Herod. Herod would do whatever it took to survive, whatever it took to hold onto his power. He would sell out his own fellow Jews and honor the Romans and their gods.

Jesus was too popular with the people; He knew that Herod dared not kill Him. Herod was probably still dealing with the backlash of beheading John to kill another prophet of the people. The only thing the Romans cared about was peace and taxes; Herod couldn’t risk a riot. No, whether the Pharisees were bluffing here or actually thought Herod wanted to kill Jesus, Jesus knew that it wasn’t His time to die yet. There was still work to do, people to heal, sermons to preach, demons to remove, and miracles to perform. Jesus knew His future, and it informed every step of His journey.

I’m not sure I would like to know when I’m going to die. The idea is the stuff of science fiction; there have been plenty of movies with that basic premise. Sometimes you can extend your life by buying more time, other times you just know.

I think that it takes a sinless person like Jesus to live a life knowing exactly when you will die. I think I would overestimate my ability to decide what is important in my life. We all have things that we do every day that don’t seem important to us but are very important to someone else. I think the biggest problem with knowing exactly when I would die would be how much time I would spend thinking about myself, my own wants, and my own happiness.

Jesus lives His life the opposite way. When He begins His ministry, He knows He has about three years left. He doesn’t spend His time traveling for fun, He doesn’t take out extravagant loans knowing that He won’t have to repay them, and He doesn’t even spend His time with His family. Jesus spends His last three years serving His Father in heaven and spreading the good news of the coming kingdom of God. Jesus spends His time serving the people, healing their diseases, and casting out demons.

That is the way of Christ; it is a way of service, of love for the neighbor. It isn’t a life focused on self-love, it is a life focused on self-denial.

None of us know exactly when we will die. Some of you may have a better idea than others, but none of us know for sure. Yet, we all know that one day, our days in this fallen creation will be over. Either we will die, or Christ will return. We may not know exactly when we will die, but we know what will happen when that day comes.

When you die, the angels will come and will bring your soul to Christ in heaven. We won’t go to heaven because of how good our life was or how good of a person we were. We will go to heaven because our faith has connected us to Christ. Then, one day, Christ will return to this earth and we will be raised from the dead and will live eternally.

Our future is both unknown and secure. We know the end, but we do not know our journey. We do not know the twists and the turns that are ahead of us. We do not know the joys or the sorrows that we will walk through in this life, but we know the joy that is waiting for us. It’s a good thing that we don’t know; it makes it easier for us to live our life sacrificially.

Jesus spends most of His ministry trying to help His disciples to understand this. Their end is coming, but they won’t know when. He gives them signs that the end is near, but no date or time. Most of the disciples would die before reaching old age; most of them would be martyred for their faith. Some people live their life running away from death; their whole life is fueled by the fear of losing their life. They spend their life thinking about themselves. I think that Covid really exposed this. People were willing to sacrifice everything, even coming to church, just because they were afraid they might lose their life.

The way of Christ is not a way of fear or self-centeredness. Again, it is a way of self-denial. Christians do not need to fear death because there is no mystery to it. The Christian perspective on life is paradoxical. We value the life of others above all other gifts from God, whether it is the life of a baby in his mother’s womb or an elderly person in a nursing home. Yet, we hold our own lives loosely in our hand, trusting that God will protect and provide for us.

Our future is secure. Whether we die on the way home from church or 50 years from now, our future is secure. The blood of Christ has ransomed us from our sins. It has given us the promise of eternal life. No matter how dark this life gets, we know that there is light at the end of the tunnel for us.

This doesn’t mean that we spend our time waiting to die. Rather, it allows us to truly live. Our future is secure; we are free to focus on the future of others. There are many here in our community who have a different future than us. There are many who do not have the faith that connects them to Christ. Maybe they are your neighbor, your co-worker, your friend, or even your own family member. There are certainly children and their families in this school who do not yet have that faith.

There are many who do not yet know Christ, many whose future is not eternal life but is instead eternal punishment. The good news is that the end has not yet come. The Son of Man has not yet returned, and there is time for more chicks to be gathered under the wings of Christ. Instead of living in fear, let us live boldly. Let us live a life of faith, putting the needs of others before our own. It isn’t easy; the way of Christ is not easy. It’s tempting to try and take shortcuts, to cut corners, to sacrifice doctrine to reach the lost. But we are not called to an easy life, we are called to a difficult one.

Jesus’ life of faithfulness took Him to a cross. Your life of faithfulness may hurt your career, your relationships, it your reputation, and there may even come a day in America where our life of faith takes us to a cross or a prison. The way of Christ is hard and difficult, but the reward is sweet. One day, we will receive our reward. One day, because of Jesus’ death on the cross, we will receive eternal life. We will receive joy so great that we cannot even comprehend it.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.