

I HAVE DECIDED...

St Andrew's UC, Sudbury; March 7, 2010 (Lent 3)

Luke 13:31-35

There's an old summer camp song I learned years ago as a child.
Maybe some of you know it as well—

*I have decided to follow Jesus
I have decided to follow Jesus
I have decided to follow Jesus
No turning back, no turning back.*

*Though none go with me, still I will follow
Though none go with me, still I will follow
Though none go with me, still I will follow
No turning back, no turning back.*

When I used to sing that song,
something would happen inside me.
I would feel something toughen up, get strong.
My resolve would harden
and I would get this stubborn feeling
that—no matter what—I was going to keep the faith.
No matter who tried to get in my way
no matter who laughed at me
no matter who else came with me or not,
I was going to keep following Jesus.
No turning back, no turning back.

I wonder if that's the sort of feeling Jesus has
in today's gospel story—
that stubborn kind of resolve that says,
“I don't care. I have decided.
No turning back, no turning back.”

He's on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus is,
and it doesn't take a rocket scientist
to figure out that this is risky business.
The political climate is unstable. Unpredictable.
Or, maybe worse: maybe it's too *predictable*.
Some of the Pharisees (who have a pretty good nose for smelling a rat)

have sniffed out some very unsettling information:
King Herod has a contract out on Jesus.
He (Herod) wants to get rid of this upstart rabbi from Galilee
before Jesus does any more political damage.

The Pharisees, we may note, are on side with Jesus this time.
Or maybe they just sense that an assassination
would not be a good thing for the status quo—
the last thing Jerusalem needs is more riots and bloodshed and violence!
At any rate, they send out a reconnaissance party
to waylay Jesus on the road south to Jerusalem.
“Jesus,” they say, planting themselves squarely in front of him
and leaning in to make eye contact,
“Jesus, you weren’t actually thinking
of going right into the city, were you?”

Jesus doesn’t break pace.
He simply walks around them and keeps on going down the road.
“Jesus,” the Pharisees insist, trotting after him,
“Jesus, you can’t keep going.
Jerusalem is a hornet’s nest right now.
All hell’s going to break loose if you go anywhere near the temple!”

No answer.
Jesus is still moving in a southerly direction.
“Okay then,” yells the squad leader,
“You may as well know.
King Herod is planning to kill you.”

At this, Jesus comes to an abrupt halt.
He wheels around to face the huffing puffing Pharisees behind him.
“Herod is planning to kill me, is he?
Well, here’s what you can go and tell that fox for me.
Tell him:
Listen. Today I’m casting out demons and healing people
and tomorrow I’ll be doing the same.
Maybe the day after that I’ll be finished all the jobs I have to do.
If you, Herod, still want to kill me by then, well—
Jerusalem has always been the place for prophets to be assassinated.”

With that, Jesus turns on his heel and resumes striding toward the city.

The cross before me, the world behind me

The cross before me, the world behind me

The cross before me, the world behind me

No turning back, no turning back.

We have decided to follow Jesus.

We—all of us who call ourselves Christians, people of the Way,
followers of Jesus—

have committed ourselves to going where Jesus goes.

Sometimes that takes a whole lot of tough,

a truckload of courage,

decades of stubbornness.

The man who was awarded half the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006
is a banker.

In fact, he's the founder of a bank—the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh—
which was the recipient of the other half of the Nobel Peace Prize that year.

The man's name is Muhammed Yunus.

And the Grameen Bank is now the largest bank in rural Bangladesh.

Over 94 per cent of its borrowers are women.

These women meet in groups of five

to support and encourage each other

and to get advice in managing their finances.

The advice comes in a step-by-step process that makes it possible

for even those who are illiterate

to understand finances and to achieve financial independence.

Muhammed Yunus started his first Grameen Bank project

over thirty years ago in Jobra, Bangladesh.

He wanted to give hope to people in Bangladesh who were living in poverty.

Yunus decided that, rather than trying to solve all the world's problems—

like global hunger or disease—

he would just find out what *he* could do

to help one person have a better day.

He began by working with the poorest of the poor.

By talking to people in their homes,

Yunus came to realize how much people suffered

for lack of a *tiny* amount of money:

One dollar, says Yunus, just one dollar can make a difference!

He made a list of 42 people who needed a total of only \$27.
Twenty-seven dollars! Less than one dollar apiece!

Yunus' first response was to lend people money out of his own pocket.
Then he tried arranging with a bank to make loans,
but the bank manager said,
"No. No, you can't lend money to poor people.
They'll never pay you back."

But Muhammed Yunus had a different picture in his mind.
And he was committed.
And stubborn
and firmly resolved.
He had decided where he was going and what he would do.
No turning back, no turning back.

And so Yunus offered himself as a guarantor, borrowed the money,
and loaned it to the poor.

And people paid it back.

In 1997 the Grameen Foundation was established.
This global network of microfinance partners making tiny loans
reaches close to 3 million families in 22 countries,
empowering them to lift themselves out of poverty, with dignity.

We have decided to follow Jesus.....
We have decided to learn from Jesus and walk in his way.
We have decided to do together what we cannot do alone.
We have decided not to kick the stone of poverty out of sight
but to take it with us on the journey.
We have decided to stand in silent witness with those who are hurting.
We have decided to pray for change
and to expect God and ourselves
to get busy with the business of transformation.
We have decided to keep the faith,
to stay on the road, to stride in the direction of the kingdom.
No turning back, no turning back.