

2nd Sunday of Lent
Sermon 3.13.22

Philippians 3:17-21

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

Luke 13:31-35

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod **wants to** kill you.” He 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. 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! How often have I **desired to** gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were **not willing!** See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (286)

What do you want?

What I want is a dining room table.

I also want reliable plumbing, that what you flush stays gone.

I want a kitchen that doesn't come apart every time you interact with it—a stove with all four burners working, an oven whose door hasn't long been pulled off by mistake and thrown away, drawer pulls that pull *open* the drawer but don't pull themselves *off* the drawers. When you have to use a butter knife to open the drawer, and the drawer you're trying to open is the one *holding the butter knives*, you're in a quandary.

It's tough, I know.

I want a beautiful light fixture and a new sofa because the old one looks shabby now that the floors are gleaming fresh. I want a powder room, not just a bathroom, a powder room, because that's what fancy people call it. And I don't want it to be right beside the countertop eat-in kitchen because that's just *yucky*.

I want wallpaper and a gold-framed mirror to reflect the light from that new light fixture.

I want the dust to be cleaned away once and for all.

I want everyone to feel at home—dogs, people, teenaged sons. But I don't want them to mess everything up—so maybe stay off the furniture.

(Oh, alright, whatever.)

I want, I want.

I am renovating much of my house. *We* are renovating much of our house. It's long past due when it comes to the kitchen, the plumbing, the crumbling slab of the breezeway (although a skunk family has enjoyed the crumbling slab as a homestead), the heating system. But then there are all those things you do "while we're at it." "While we're at it," we might as well put that light switch where we'd more naturally use it. "While we're at it," we might as well replace these rotting windows and moldy clapboards. "While we're at it," we might as well insulate the walls and, while we're at it, we might as well move the doorway—so we have better use of the whole room.

I am here to tell you: it is a slippery slope. What you want goes from "no raw sewage in the basement," to a new powder room light fixture very, very quickly—and plumbing and a light fixture can cost the same thing. Really, you can spend a couple thousand dollars on a light fixture. It's disorienting.

Desire is a slippery thing—and when the limit isn't set by what cash is your wallet, you cast about as to where the limit is.

I used to be a cash-only girl. (Just a little more on all this.) Through graduate school, everything I did, except for student loans, was in cash. It helped me enormously to figure out what I could afford, what something is worth to me, or *should* be worth to me.

When the wallet is empty that movie isn't an option for weekend fun.

There's always next weekend if you go light this week.

So, that first mortgage, twenty years ago: here is when I departed from the land of cash, moved into the ether of credit and debt, moved to where mere desire is your guide, *your* desire—though desire is a ship without a rudder, a ship without *friction*.

When it came to moving again, fifteen years ago, and to thinking through another mortgage, the time of predatory lending was upon us. Turns out, we Goodmans were pre-approved for mortgages that would have, turns out, qualitatively changed our lives. We'd have become slaves of a sort—slaves in the classic sense of the word, not the American chattel-slavery meaning of it. Slavery used to be more about crushing indebtedness, the sort of state you could eventually work your way out of, if you were very lucky. And, if you ask me, we're right to understand many current situations in terms of slavery—as long as we understand American chattel-slavery resultant of kidnapping Africans as a whole other order of evil.

This, Jesse explained to me (that we could become slaves to a bank) as I went imagining living in homes far grander than what I'd ever imagined, or wanted—that all those extra rooms, all those extra architectural details, all those extra acres, would effectively enslave us.

It's a trick in this realm of conceptual money to find your footing in actual worth.

This is the smoke-and-mirrors of capitalism, and the financialization of our whole economy. These have largely progressively removed any limit in our material lives. Now, money is only worth what you decide it's worth—no longer directly equal to the bread and shelter you need to live, but something far slipperier than that.

I'm convinced this is what made life in Costa Rica seem appealing. People there for the most part seemed so utterly content. And they live closer to the real there, which buffers you from the thrum of anxiety that has those of us in the developed world live like the cartoon roadrunner. See, you've run off the cliff. You're running in thin air.

Better not look down.

It all begs the question: can we *trust* our deciding on this? Can we trust our deciding on the true worth of things?

A classic understanding of sin is disordered desire. Sin manifests as disordered desire. We don't know what we want. We don't know what *to* want. We can't figure what has true value. Our desire alights on an object and then withdraws from that object only to move on to yet another object, a *better* object. You want a dining table. And then you want a *mahogany* dining table, which has you rethinking the one there in your dining room, which isn't mahogany. And maybe the chairs, too, though one of them you're now sitting on. Is it really what you want? Is it really *that* great? You could do better.

The Greek word for this is *thelō*, and it translates “desire” or “willing,” and it shows up three times in the gospel passage we just heard. Yes, turns out, desire gets called out in the gospel. Turns out, desire, so wrapped up in sin, is also wrapped up in good news. Here, in the 13th chapter of Luke, we hear of what Herod wants, what the people want, and what Jesus wants.

Herod wants to kill Jesus. This we learn as Jesus apparently learned it, when some Pharisees showed up to tell him as much. “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” Jesus had begun his journey to Jerusalem, this city that was the power center, this city where important things happened, this city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it. It's where Herod had his palace, and Herod had created an even more gleaming Temple. This was Herod's realm, that fox, where Jesus, as hen, didn't stand a chance.

Herod was a man of appetites, of wanting—and, as tetrarch, he tended to get what he wanted. Of course, one thing he didn't get was to be monarch, which is to say the one king of the realm. He was tetrarch, which is to say the realm had been divided into four parts and he was ruler of one of those parts.

This he was alongside his three brothers, whom he'd have had killed for their portion of the realm. Barring that, he did at least have one of them killed to get his *wife*. Herodias had been married to Herod's brother, the crown prince Antipater. But Herod had Antipater killed, and then took his wife.

There's reason to believe she wasn't content in this arrangement: the reason, she asked for John the baptizer to be beheaded, killed. She knew that Herod liked John the baptizer. He kept him like a pet, imprisoned him in the palace, because, as scripture tells us, he liked to listen to him talk.

Herodias put an end to that. "Give me John's head on a platter."

As for killing Jesus, this seems to have been all Herod. And we can only guess as to why. My guess is that Jesus was reordering desire, resetting what is to be desired. Now not the greatest of things, but the least; now not the most forceful of things, but the meek, the vulnerable, the open to receiving love as he was opening a reign of love: what's to be desired isn't gleaming palaces or monumental temples but the body, the human body, the creaturely body, site of pain and sickness, site of shame and limitation, site of supple creativity and ordinary beauty and artful, surprising, vulnerable love.

But kings depend upon worldly desire, worldly awe. The power of a king, or even of a tetrarch, depends upon the people all in the thrall of the worldly—worldly shows of glory, worldly shows of strength. Palaces, pomp, military might, the god of the belly, as Paul calls it in his letter to the churches in Philippi.

That this one who had none of that, and yet was winning the love of the crowds; that this Jesus who had nothing but his body and his gathering body, this crowd, the people who learned from him and listened to him and were loved because of him and therefore could love because of him: this was *outrageous*. This was starting to seem dangerous.

"You can't change the rules when I'm about to win the game," Herod might well have raged. He'd built up so much. He'd built the Temple, bigger and better than ever. The people should love him for that. And don't tell me the Temple was about to be history. Don't tell me the Temple was about to be torn down, like it were nothing, like it were nothing. Don't tell me that.

This was supposed to be a fixture. This was supposed to be permanent—a permanent memorial to me, an ever-established monument to my might.

Meanwhile, something far easier than the Temple was coming near him to destroy. Jesus was in effect a hen nearing the fox-house, and we can all imagine how that would go.

But, so, Jesus desired: to gather all Bethlehem as a hen gathers her brood of chicks. Himself: the house in which people find shelter. Himself: the temple of sheltering love.

But the children of Jerusalem were not willing, were not *thelō*. They were yet caught in the place in between, caught in between the appeal of love and the thrall of worldly pomp and power, between the God of sheltering love and the restless, demanding, deceiving god of the belly. One seemed so precarious, the other struck as far more trustworthy.

But the more you thought about it, the more the precarious one seems actually to transcend while the more established one seems somehow doomed.

The more you think about it, the more the vulnerable one seems likely to abide while the monumental one seems founded on things subject to material decay or human whim or war.

You can burn down a building. It's a lot harder to burn down love. You can bomb a building. It's impossible, though, to eradicate love, truth.

What do you want?

What do *you* want?

I want to prepare a place for love. I want to maintain such places as where love might take place.

That's what I want.

Thanks be to God.