

STUBBORN FOR US

Luke 9:51-62

“Stubborn as a mule.” We have all experienced stubborn people. As Lutherans many of us have German backgrounds, so we know that stubbornness is in our genes. A policeman pulled over a man on Highway 30 west of Boone. The man was only going 30 mph on the highway. The policeman asked him if something was wrong. The man insisted that he was supposed to only go 30 mph. When the policeman asked him why, the man said, “The sign says US 30, so I only go 30.” Then a policeman looked into the back seat and noticed an old woman who was visibly shaken. When he asked her if something was wrong. She answered, “Everything is okay now, but we just got off US 169.”

If you talk with couples as they prepare for marriage, when they get serious about things they do have to admit that they are stubborn. Think of how we argue and go on rather than admit we might be wrong. We are stubborn.

In the year 490 BC a stubborn man named Themistocles became prominent in ancient Greece. The mighty Persian Empire had tried to invade Greece that year, but they were driven back at Marathon, a victory that is still remembered in foot races today. Most Greeks thought their worry about the Persians was over. But Themistocles thought otherwise. He knew the Greek had won at Marathon only because the Persians had only got a small army ashore. He was convinced that the Persians would come back with a much bigger army. And when they did his home city of Athens would be forsaken by most of the Greeks who would try to protect southern Greece. He felt the only way to secure Greece and especially Athens was to build a navy strong enough to keep the Persians from supplying a large army in Greece. But the people didn't want to hear what he had to say. The movie “Evan Almighty” depicts a modern day version of Noah and the ark. Remember how foolish Noah looked to people as he built an ark. Who needed a boat in the middle of land? Why did the Greeks need a navy for an enemy that was far away?

But Themistocles didn't give up. When he realized that he would never get the funds to build a navy to stop Persia, he made up an imaginary threat from a neighboring city of Athens. He was able to convince the people of Athens to build a navy to protect from this imaginary threat. But when that threat did not materialize, Themistocles got in trouble from people who thought the navy was a waste of funds. He had to stubbornly fight and persuade to keep it going.

Then in 480 his fears came true. The Persians sent such a large army that it took two days for it to cross a pontoon bridge they built from Turkey to Greece. No Greek army seemed capable of stopping it. At Thermopylae, the Greeks held the Persians back until the Persians found a way around that pass. Most of the Greeks fled to the south; leaving Athens to the Persians. What were the people to do? Themistocles convinced them to abandon Athens to the Persians. He lured the Persian fleet into a trap and crushed it at Salamis. The Persian army was

still intact, but it could not be kept supplied. Most of the army went back to Persian. The forces left behind were defeated the next year by the Greeks. Themistocles was stubborn, but his stubbornness saved Greece.

Jesus was stubborn too. In Luke 9:51 we aren't even near halfway through the Gospel of Luke. Yet already at that point Luke tells us, "As the time approached for Him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." The rest of Luke's Gospel tells us how Jesus set out on His way to His death on the cross in Jerusalem. He would send out 72 of His disciples in pairs to prepare the way for His coming. He would travel through Samaria on His way south to Judea and Jerusalem. He would stop at the home of Mary and Martha, teach many parables including the prodigal son and the lost sheep. He would encounter ten lepers whom He would heal, but only one, a Samaritan, would come back to thank Him. He would meet a little man named Zacchaeus and make him come down from the tree to take Jesus to his home. Then He would enter Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. All along the way Jesus would face distractions. In our text His disciples James and John wanted Him to rain fire down on Samaritan towns that would not welcome Him. People would come to Him with all kinds of requests. He would be tempted to let them turn Him into a king, to win a popularity contest by His miracles or to just leave people to their own problems. But Jesus was stubborn, so stubborn. He let nothing keep Him from what awaited Him in Jerusalem—a cross.

The obstacles didn't end there for Jesus. The crowds that awaited Him on Palm Sunday wanted to make Him a king. His enemies, the Jewish leaders, wanted to eliminate Him, but not during Passover when so many of Jesus' supporters were around. And Pontius Pilate and the Roman government didn't want to do anything radical like execute a popular Jewish figure during the Passover festival. Jesus' disciples didn't want to hear about Jesus being arrested. In fact Peter wanted to put up a fight in the Garden of Gethsemane. Pilate was almost begging Jesus to help make it possible for Pilate to let Him go free. Herod just wanted Jesus to do a miracle. It would have been so easy for Jesus to just stop. But instead he stubbornly went on as the nails were driven into His hand and feet and He was lifted up to die.

And God doesn't stop in that stubbornness. Some have referred to God as the "hound of heaven" because like a hound stubbornly going after its prey, God stubbornly goes after us, refusing our constant rejection and sending His Holy Spirit into our lives to turn our lives around and follow Him.

Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. He stubbornly set out to enter into your heart and mind. He went the way that led to His death on the cross because He was thinking of each and every one of us. He thought of your sins and mine and went the way that took to Him the cross where He could nail those sins there forever.