

## “Overcoming Obstacles”

Time after Pentecost

Luke 7:11-17

June 6, 2010

Life has always been a struggle. Regardless of the time in history, people have found life difficult. Whether we are learning to live with a bully, finding one's place in the job market, or learning to exercise self-restraint, growing up is a series of overcoming obstacles. When Luke wrote to the people of his day he was telling them that with Jesus Christ we have help in overcoming the obstacles in life (even life itself).

We are reasonable people. That is, we use reason to govern our actions, our goals, and our behavior (well most of the time). What is logical, knowable, and that which has been shown to be true is what makes sense to us. When someone prescribes an avenue that has not been tested, tried, or even experienced we tend to doubt its validity. After all, it isn't a reasonable request. What seems to happen is that we make grand statements, couching them in dogma that gives them the aura of truth. As time wears on they become firmly rooted. We begin to stop questioning their integrity to the point they are doctrine. That which is reasonable is true and that which is untried, illogical, and unreasonable is false. We begin then to interpret life (even God) through these sweeping (however reasonable) gestures. Openness to mystery and the unexplainable isn't reasonable behavior so we tend to discard such notions. We seek answers but only ones that fit the mold of experience, expectation, and assumption. It is a reasonable thing to do. When obstacles of life come about the only way out is that which makes the most sense. What we overlook is that there are reasons for behavior, circumstance, and events that cannot be explained away by conventional means.

Our lesson has a unique context. Where Luke has placed this story in his Gospel helps us to understand the point of the story. Luke placed this story (a story only in Luke) between the beatitudes and the parables concerning the kingdom of God on one side and the story of John the Baptist's doubt about Jesus and who he was on the other side. The placement of our lesson between these stories helps to make the point of the lesson for today. The beatitudes and parables of the kingdom of God help to explain why Jesus came. And the story of John the Baptist's doubt about Jesus shows how expectations, life experiences, and assumptions can fog one's view of reality, and in this case, who Jesus is.

The chapter before as well as the preceding verses speaks of persecution, hatred, wealth and poverty, as well as sickness and death. These were very familiar themes in Jesus' day. These themes are common today as well. They make up what I refer to as part of life's obstacles.

If it weren't for hatred, fighting, envy, rivalry, sickness and death life would be pretty good. Wouldn't it be great if we didn't have to worry about immigration reform, economic hardship, drugs or alcohol abuse, or injustice of any kind? But we do. It is the human predicament. It is not what God had intended but it is part of life, our life. And it was part of the people's lives of Luke's day as well. As we seek to solve these issues we use reason and logic to do so, which is a reasonable thing to do. However, since our nature is sinful (not perfect) we look at life and seek to use reason from a tainted point of view. This is where Jesus comes in.

In chapters 6 and 7 Luke speaks of solutions to life's problems. Luke shows us the way to overcome the obstacles of life. It is just that the way in which Luke shows, doesn't always seem to make sense, it doesn't always seem the reasonable thing to do. But then, where God is concerned, reason and logic seldom apply. This is a major reason why John the Baptist doubted if Jesus was in fact the Messiah. What Jesus was doing didn't always seem to make sense. No wonder John said, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Luke 7:20) In John's eyes Jesus was doing it all wrong, he wasn't making any sense.

To overcome obstacles such as hatred, poverty and sickness a Messiah was needed. The Messiah had to come in a specific way, according to what made sense to the people who waited for him. When Jesus didn't come nor behave in the expected way, well it was only made sense (reasonable to assume) that Jesus wasn't the Messiah. And yet the sick were healed, the dead were raised, and the poor were given good news. Obstacles such as pain, loneliness, heartache, and death were being overcome in Jesus. What gave the people of Israel a fit was that Jesus was doing these things in an illogical, unreasonable way. Forgiveness was proclaimed. Mercy was extended. Compassion was handed out.

God often works in our lives in ways we least expect, often in ways that cannot be measured. But the results are known. We see relationships healed, people turning their lives around, faith rekindled, etc. When this happens in ways we cannot see and at a pace we feel cannot be known or measured we become frustrated. In our frustration we lash out at one another, calling each other names, accusing each other of not acting like Christians are supposed to (as if there is a criteria by which all are measured).

Too often reason and logic fail us. The obstacle seems too great to get over. In anguish and frustration we cry out in anger. Like the widow in our lesson we weep over the loss we feel and assume it has beaten us. But then Jesus comes to us, raising us up out of our despair. Like the boy being raised to life so to are our hopes.

Maybe you are facing an obstacle that seems too great. Maybe it feels all too overwhelming. Reason tells us we cannot win and so we feel like giving up. Luke tells us not to give up. We learn that where God is hope remains. Behind the apparent inconsistencies in life, the game playing, the failures and setbacks, God is acting in our lives. Hidden from our eyes, lying under the obstacles blind from reason God is present, active, working in our lives. It isn't always reasonable or predictable. Sometimes that is the way God works.

God comes into our lives and overcomes our obstacles. Sin seeks to destroy but God gives life. We do not always see the process. That's OK. Let us celebrate that there is a process. Let us hold fast to our conviction that God in Jesus is active even where there seems to be no evidence. Let us be thankful that as life remains difficult God is overcoming the obstacles of life.

AMEN