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Whatever It Takes

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Luke 9:51-62

'When the days drew near for him to be received up, Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem.' It is a strange phrase 'set his face' to go to Jerusalem. Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is long, dangerous, and draining. Set his face to go to Jerusalem is less about setting out a physical road map and more about establishing a code for keeping his eyes on the prize. Scholar George Buttrick wrote, "According to Luke, Jesus' passion has been determined upon by the purpose of God and is his inescapable destiny; and this fact Jesus himself knows. Nevertheless, he must summons his own resolution to go to his death."

Jesus set his face with determination to serve God's grand purpose. But it is worth noting that we are only in chapter 9 when Jesus sets his face to go to Jerusalem and he doesn't actually arrive in Jerusalem until chapter 19. It might take us an hour or so to read those 10 chapters of the gospel but for Jesus this is a significant part of his public ministry spent on the journey through Samaria to his final resting place or resurrection place, as it would turn out. On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus sort of ping-pongs around the countryside – Luke's geographical references leave us confused as to Jesus' travel itinerary. He is over here, then over there, then somewhere he is completely out of the way. You can imagine Jesus programming Jerusalem, town center, into Google maps but then completely ignoring the guidance. 'Recalculating route' it yells at him as he detours again and again on his way. I thought he set his face to go to Jerusalem? Seems like a weird way to get there!

You may have heard of Isaiah Berlin's idea about the different mindset of types of people embodied in either the fox or the hedgehog. Berlin says that the hedgehog views the world through one single defining idea. Whereas the fox draws upon wide experiences and does not boil the world down singularly. The strength of the hedgehog is his focus and central vision and uncompromising nature. The strength of the fox is his flexibility and openness. The hedgehog keeps his head down and never waivers. The fox is more pragmatic, strategic, and inclined to nuance. Many a Harvard Business Review article have debated the benefits of one approach verses another. One author will argue that foxes are superior. The next says the hedgehogs are the ones who really get the work done. Then, of course the next argues that it is only the combination of fox and hedgehog qualities that lead to true leadership.

The fact that Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem would make you think that he was a hedgehog, focused only on the end goal. But the fact that it took him 10 chapters to get to Jerusalem, stopping for dinner parties, long lectures, philosophical debates, and happenstance meetings with strangers, makes you think he might be more of a fox.

Reality is we all have to employ fox AND hedgehog mentality at times – Jesus had set his face to go to Jerusalem and he *was* going to get there. In Jerusalem, he knew that he would wrestle with the powers that be, threaten the status quo, suffer physically, die on a cross, and then proclaim a higher power through the resurrection. He predicted all of this – these things would happen, no matter what. This was his mission. This was his calling. This was his great act of love. Jesus’ death and resurrection were his focus but they did not fully embody his purpose.

For on the way to the cross, he also had to proclaim the gospel – he had to teach the people in word and deed about how to love God and their neighbors, he had to meet the people - see them, know them, love them, he had to proclaim good news to the poor, the sick, the imprisoned. Somehow if Jesus had marched his way immediately to the cross there would have been unfinished business. Because along the road he had disciples who needed to be inspired, he had followers who needed to be called, he had lives that needed to be changed. Because all of these people would be entrusted to carry on those stories, to tell his messages of good news, and to further his acts of service. Jesus, as fox, was willing to make stops on the journey, he was able to see people for their specific needs, and he understood of the strategy needed for engendering faithfulness. Jesus, as hedgehog, never wavered from his ultimate destination and was always going to get to the salvific act in Jerusalem.

Jim Collin’s in his book, *Good to Great* said that Abraham Lincoln was both a fox and a hedgehog. Lincoln had his primary objectives for the country and dogged determination to get there. He was also strategic, he could be nuanced, and he found non-linear paths to his goals. It took him chapters of his life to achieve his objectives but he got there despite huge loss and risk for the country and for his family. Jesus had this type of ability to employ what Jim Collin’s has termed Level 5 leadership.

There is another great fox and hedgehog story in the Bible – the Good Samaritan, the story of the man who had been robbed and left for dead. So many passersby left him because they had set their face to go places. But the Samaritan stopped, cared for him, checked him into an inn, made sure he was going to be okay, and then kept going on his journey. He didn’t abandon his previous travel goals nor did he ignore the blatant needs of the man on the road. He did both. Fox and hedgehog.

I like this for a modern picture of faith – fox and hedgehog – you have to go to Jerusalem – you have to set your face to serve God, find a purpose, and be faithful, whatever it takes. You also have to embody God’s love daily in small and selfless acts modeled after Christ’s own example, whatever it takes. Fox and hedgehog. Be determined but also be willing to make unexpected stops. Be focused but never lose your compassion. Be disciplined but always understanding Christ’s call to stop for worship and wonder. Jesus as the end goal; Jesus as the daily goal. Jesus as present guide; Jesus as future Savior.

Rev. Dr. Martin Copenhaver was preaching his last sermon at his beloved congregation in Massachusetts, leaving them to become the President of Andover Newton Seminary. He decided to spend most of that final sermon speaking devotionally about Jesus. The conclusion of the sermon titled "What's it all about?" went like this:

*As I am about to leave, there is something I want to tell you. I want to tell you what Jesus means to me. I want to share my belief that everything depends on him. I want to urge you to learn from him. I want to assure you that you can lean on him in times of trouble. I want to tell you that I believe that you can entrust your life to him. I want to affirm that he is Lord of this church and that in his name you are freed to love one another and empowered to share that love with a hurting world. I want to profess that, though once people could not look at the face of God and live, now we are invited to look at the face of God in him, in Jesus, and live as we have never lived before. He is Emmanuel, God with us, God with us all, whether we are together or apart. That's what it's all about. That's all I know. Amen.*

When the service was over he stood at the door shaking hands and saying goodbye. "One woman," he writes, "a beloved saint of the church, came to head of the line but was so overcome with emotion that she could not speak and went to the back of the line. I assumed she simply did not know how to say goodbye. When she finally reached me, she extended her hand to mine, her shocking blue eyes filled with tears. Her voice cracked as she asked, "Why didn't you tell us this before?"

Jesus is a worthy guide for our lives. In Jesus, we find our road map. In Jesus, we see the face of God. In Jesus, we experience unconditional love. In Jesus, we receive the most demanding challenge of our lives. In Jesus, we experience endless opportunities for grace. In Jesus, we find freedom, our purpose, and our salvation.

Jesus was going to show us the way and the truth and the life no matter what that cost him. Jesus found a way to change both individual lives and to change the world. He inspires us to do likewise in our own corners of the kingdom – having a grand purpose and mission for our lives while employing small and specific acts of faith along the way – fox and hedgehog. Thanks be to God, for the model of One who could so love the world that he would find a way to save us – in life, in death, and in life beyond death!

Amen.