

"Home By Another Way"  
Isaiah 55:6-13  
Matthew 2:7-12

Last week, after Christmas Sun and I, spending a few days with my two daughters and son in law and grandson, had an opportunity to watch a movie about Ernest Hemingway's life story, "In Love and War." As everybody knows, Ernest Hemingway was a famous writer, a Nobel Prize winner in literature.

After watching the movie, I pondered about Hemingway's life. His literature was highly commended by others but his life did not end well. He committed suicide after he wrote "The Old Man and the Sea." "The Old Man and the Sea" gives us something to think about in life.

The old man, named Santiago had set out for eighty four days to fish with a young man and returned from fishing without catching anything. Thus on the eighty-fifth day, Santiago set out alone again, taking a skiff far into the Gulf. He set his lines and, by noon of the first day, a big fish took his bait. He caught a great marlin, the biggest fish he had ever caught.

It was so a great that he was not able to pull it in. The old man spent two days and two nights struggling and bearing the tension of the line with his body. Though he was wounded by the struggle and in pain, the old man commended himself because both he and the noble fish put up such a great fight. For Santiago, no person was worthy enough to eat the great marlin.

On the third day of the ordeal, the fish began to circle the skiff, indicating his tiredness to the old man. Santiago, now completely worn out and almost delirious, used all the strength he had left in himself to pull the fish onto its side and stab the marlin with a harpoon, thereby ending his long battle with the tenacious fish.

Santiago strapped the marlin to his skiff and headed home, thinking about the high price the fish would bring him at the market and how many people he would feed.

But there was another problem. While Santiago continued his journey back to the shore, sharks were attracted to the trail of blood left by the marlin in the water. The first, a great mako shark, Santiago killed with his harpoon, losing that weapon in the process. He made a new harpoon by strapping his knife to the end of an oar to help ward off the next line of sharks; in total, five sharks were slain and many others were driven away.

But by night, the sharks had almost devoured the marlin's entire carcass, leaving a skeleton consisting mostly of its backbone, its tail and its head, the latter still bearing the giant spear. The old man punished himself for sacrificing the marlin.

Finally reaching the shore before dawn on the next day, he struggled on the way to his shack, carrying the heavy mast on his shoulder. Once home, he slumped onto his bed and entered a very deep sleep.

A group of fishermen gathered around the boat the next day where the fish's skeleton was still attached. One of the fishermen measured it to be eighteen feet from nose to tail.

The old man's risk, and endeavor for ninety days struggling with waves of the sea, of fish and of sharks left only eighteen feet of the marlin's skeleton. This was an expression of the nihilism with which Hemingway viewed the world.

After Christmas, and expecting New Year in 2009, we are here to ponder what our resolutions would be. This morning we read the story of three noble men who visited Bethlehem and found another way to return home. I would like to share their ways as our New Year's resolutions this morning.

The story goes like this. After they had heard the king, the three noble men went on their way and suddenly found the star and they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of frankincense and of myrrh. And when they were ready to go back home, they, having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, returned to their country by another route.

"Do not go back to Herod!" That is the message given to us from the Lord. "Take another road home!" We are all on the way home (to God). The home is getting closer and closer to us. The life of 2009 is closer than 2008 to God. Certainly we are on the way to home. As a fisher man, Hemingway probably recalled and recounted himself and found that the life he had lived left only a eighteen feet length of a skeleton of a fish. That is a meaningless ending to life.

To be a Christian means to use another kind of life map and to take another road for the rest of one's life. Christians are all theologians. What theology you have in your mind is important. We usually say that we are not saved by service but by the grace of God. It is right that service is not a means of salvation but the purpose of salvation. You're not saved by service, but you are saved for service. This gives our life great significance and value. It cost Jesus his own life to purchase our salvation. "God paid a great price for you. So use your body to honor God."(1 Cor 6:20)

John Wesley said that there are two kinds of grace among believers: One is cheap grace and the other is precious grace. Those who know only that by the grace of Christ we are free from the sin, death, and destruction are believers of cheap grace. But those who believe that we are freed by the grace of Jesus and also for the kingdom of God are believers of the precious grace of God. We are

called to be responsible for the kingdom of God. That's why we should not go back to Herod.

Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."  
(Matthew 7:13-14)

"The road less traveled" is a book written by a Medical Doctor, Scott Peck. In his book, Peck said, "In attempting to avoid the pain of responsibility is the escaping from freedom. Millions and even billions daily attempt to escape from freedom. Those who take one's responsibility become free people. To the extent that they do not accept this they will forever feel themselves victims. Erich Fromm wrote a book, "Escape from Freedom" and said that real freedom is taking responsibility. Christian love is not feeling. It is taking up the cross, care and responsibility for somebody else.

Do not go to back to Herod in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the city where Herod's kingdom is. There is heavy traffic to the Jerusalem. The road to Jerusalem is a dead end. There were often robbery incidents on the way from Jericho to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is no longer a religious city. It is a symbol of power, success, and the prestige of people. The way to Jerusalem is dangerous for travelers. There are many people who are heading to Jerusalem to look for worldly happiness.

But you are not called to be a citizen of Jerusalem but a citizen of the Kingdom of God. There are three reasons that we should not go to back to Herod.

First, Herod is a liar. His saying, "I would worship Jesus later" is a lie. Telling a lie is common in our life. But it is wrong. We do not trust someone who tells lies. Telling a lie is wrong and bad. There are many people who follow false truth. "Wealth, youth, power, honor will bring to you happiness" is a false philosophy of life. That is a mirage which is refracted by worldly greed. That is an illusion of worldly desire. That is the wrong way to go.

Herod is a self-centered man. The Bible, from cover to cover, is emphatic that this self-centeredness will ultimately destroy us. Hell is symbolized by self-centeredness and self-pity, heaven is symbolized by self-giving and sharing.

Second, Herod is a disturber. When King Herod heard that Jesus had been born, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

We are called to belong, not just believe. Where you belong is important in your life. If you were to belong to a place where everybody were disturbed you would be disturbed also.

People of God are a people of hope. Church is a community of God's hope. I saw a greeting card recently that said: "What do you give a man who has everything?" Answer: A second remote control. But, what do you give to a man who has nothing? My answer is Hope. Jesus told us, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust in me."

On the slope of Long's Peak in Colorado Springs lies the ruin of a gigantic tree. Naturalists tell us it had stood for some four hundred years. It was a seedling when Columbus arrived at San Salvador; it was half-grown when Pilgrims settled at Plymouth. During the course of its long life, it had been struck by lightning fourteen times and innumerable avalanches and storms had hit it, burned it, and thundered past it. Yet, it had survived them all.

In the end, however, it fell. Why? Because an army of tiny beetles ate their way through the bark and gradually destroyed the tree with their incessant attacks. A forest giant that age could not wither, lightning could not blast, storms could not subdue, but it fell at last before beetles so small you could crush them with your finger.

Little worries are like those tiny beetles - small, but always there, attacking incessantly, continually burrowing their way into the heart and devastating our inner strength until we collapse.

Third and last, Herod had a conspiracy to kill Jesus. Herod called the wise men secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. And sending them, said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." That was Herod's conspiracy to kill Jesus. That is evil's conspiracy. We are living in dangerous proximity to evil's conspiracy.

But, don't worry about the conspiracy of evil. There is also a Divine conspiracy for us. Paul unveils to us God's conspiracy. "We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son."

Our hope in difficult times is not based on positive thinking, wishful thinking, or optimism. It is certainly based on the truth that God is in complete control of our universe and that he loves us. There is certainly God's conspiracy for us.

Much of what happens in our world is evil and bad, but God specializes in bringing good out of it. God's purpose is greater than our problems, our pain, and even our sin.

Isaiah explains the road of the Lord. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are

your ways my ways declares the Lord.

As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater."

Isaiah recites God's word, "So is my word that goes out from my mouth; It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

In conclusion, I would like to show you the scene of the Kingdom of God that you will see at the end of your journey.

"You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace, the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of field will clap their hands. Instead of the thorn bush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briers the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord's renown for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed."