

## **The Way Around** *Luke 13:31–34*

Last week, we hosted an evangelism seminar with Rev. Kwan Kim, and it truly warmed our hearts. He was wonderful, wasn't he? Do you know how I knew? He preached for about 40 minutes, and nobody complained! After hearing Rev. Kim's message, some of our members said they want to prepare a music concert in April as an opportunity for people to come to church. Others have already started inviting their family members. Praise God.

One member of Zion shared something especially meaningful. After the message, she went out right away and shared the gospel with someone she had been praying for since early January—praying for the chance to reach out. Then, the very next day, that person's young daughter—who had never been to church even once—came and attended Sunday school worship for the first time. Praise God.

Some may say, "It's not a big deal. It was just one visit." But in the Kingdom of God, first steps matter. For a child who had been living without knowing God to step into church for the first time—that alone is a miracle. So let's take courage and invite the people around us.

During the seminar, Rev. Kim asked us three questions: Why should people meet Jesus? Why should people come to church? And why should people come to our church? If our answers are clear, we can share our faith with more confidence.

The first question is the most essential: Why should people meet Jesus? The simplest answer is: Jesus is the way of salvation. John calls Jesus "the living Word of God"—God's message to us in a life we can see. And Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). That means Jesus is the way back into unity with God—the source of life.

Still, the phrase "a life lived with God" can feel hard to grasp. It can sound abstract. On the long pilgrimage of life, even when we want to live according to God's will, we can feel unsure about what that really looks like. But the life and teachings of Jesus are like a guidebook that shows us clearly what it means to live connected to God—and how we can live that way.

### **Among Many Guidebooks...**

As many of you know, this July I'll be walking the John Muir Trail—211 miles. After my permit came through, the very first thing I bought was a guidebook, because you need a plan. I thought I was buying clarity. Turns out, I was buying confusion in paperback. Every guidebook gives different mileage. An online map says 12 miles, the book says 16. I even asked an AI, and it gave me the wrong mileage—and insisted it was right. So I argued with the AI for an hour.

There are many guidebooks for a long trail. But in life, there are even more "guidebooks," and depending on which one we follow, the direction of our lives changes. At the beginning of the film *The Way*, pilgrims argue about whose guidebook is accurate, and it turns into a fight. But what was really guiding them wasn't the paper book—it was the world's expectations and other people's expectations.

One man says, "I wanted to be a bullfighter. But my father wanted me to become a lawyer." Tom, the main character, lived by the guidebook the world calls "a stable and successful life." A pilgrim named Joost walked the Camino to lose weight because his wife wanted him to be thinner. And an Irish writer—who wanted to write a novel—came on the pilgrimage because his editor told him to write a light travel book that would sell. They are

walking the Camino—and also walking the pilgrimage of their lives—still lost, trapped by what others expect and by the standards the world demands. That doesn't feel unfamiliar, does it?

So what is the “guidebook of life” we are following—often without realizing it? Maybe it's the “traditional American Dream guidebook extended edition.” That is not necessarily a bad thing. The problem is that this standardized guidebook cannot satisfy the deep thirst of our souls.

And some people hold out even bigger guidebooks—“national security,” “national interest”—and use them to justify oppression and violence. Think about the war situation between the United States and Iran. Jesus shows us compassion and love—even love that embraces enemies. But some people say, “That's not how the world works.” They call it “idealistic” or “naïve.” They say, “We don't have a choice.” They say it's “common sense” that for our safety we must strike first with overwhelming force. And if we speak of peace and love, they bare their teeth, calling us “unpatriotic traitors” or “dangerous forces that threaten national security.”

Herod, who appears in verse 31 of today's passage, is a living example of an “EPIC FURY guidebook.” Herod had John the Baptist beheaded when John confronted him about his wrongdoing. So there was absolutely no way he would look kindly on Jesus, who speaks the truth.

The Pharisees warn Jesus: “Leave this place. Herod wants to kill you.” In Herod's guidebook, there are only two options: submit—or die. It is control through power and fear. And the world still whispers: “Be crafty like a fox. Build up your strength and bite first. That's how you survive.”

But Jesus' answer is completely different. Jesus refuses to be trapped in that survival-of-the-fittest logic. Jesus says, “Go and tell that fox...” (v. 32). Jesus calls Herod a predator that tears into the weak. And Jesus compares himself to something else: “Like a hen gathering her chicks under her wings...” (v. 34). Debie Thomas says the hen is a symbol of vulnerability and courage. When predators draw near, hens gather their chicks under their wings. They puff themselves up as much as they can, and even though a hen cannot defeat a fox or an eagle, she does not run away. She stays—afraid, but standing her ground—offering her own body to danger for the sake of the chicks. Making yourself vulnerable to protect another—this is true courage, and this is love.

The world tells us to become a “fox.” But Jesus became a “hen,” willing to be wounded, gathering us in. Not forcing others into submission, but choosing the hard and narrow way—the way around—holding others with compassion. This is the “way of life” Jesus has shown us.

### **Making Eye Contact Together**

Of course, walking this path is not easy. It's narrow. It's the longer way around. We may stumble. We may fall. But it's okay—because the Lord walks this path with us. I read a story like this. A doctor was walking in a park when a small child fell down and began to cry. Then a little girl—maybe about four years old—ran over to the child. The doctor thought she was going to help the child stand up. But instead, the girl lay down flat on her belly right in front of the child, looked him in the eyes, and she smiled brightly. And then the crying child began to smile too. After a moment, the girl said, “Let's get up.” The child said, “Okay,” stood up, and the two children walked away holding hands.

This story captures the mystery of the Incarnation we face during Lent. God did not stay far away and only command, “This is the right way—walk it.” God came among us in a human body, walked the road firsthand, and showed us the way. And when we fall, God comes close—

willing to place God's own belly on the cold ground and meet our eyes. The One who shares our pain and tears in the lowest place, the One who meets our eyes—this is Jesus Christ.

The world's guidebook teaches, "Don't be weak. Get ahead. Crush those who threaten you." But the Lord chose the path of going lower—the path of becoming vulnerable, coming down to meet our eyes. And this is the path we must choose: the way around, yet the way that leads to life—not the "way of the fox," but the "way of compassion."

Now we must write, with our own lives, the answers to those three questions. Why should people meet Jesus? Because Jesus is the only true guidebook for our lives—the love that meets our eyes when we have fallen and says, "Let's get up." That love is what gives us life.

Why should people come to church? Because the church is where we practice laying down the world's guidebook. In a world that insists we can only survive by becoming a "fox," the church is the pilgrimage of people who say, "No—we will become like a hen, gathering one another under our wings."

Why should people come to Asbury? Because it is a church with many "foolish hens" who embrace others with love more than crafty foxes—a church overflowing with love.

My beloved Asbury family, this week, when the world pressures you to become a "fox," choose the way around—the way of following the Lord, the way of becoming a "vulnerable hen." When hearts of compassion gather, our Asbury UMC will become a shelter where the weary find true peace and rest—under the Lord's warm wings. With the Lord, and holding one another's hands, let us walk this beautiful pilgrimage boldly. Amen.