Jesus made choices from the perspective of his future self. As he travelled toward Jerusalem, some Pharisees said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you!” (Luke 13:31). The Pharisees often opposed Jesus, so we are not sure if they wanted to help him or hurt him. But whatever their motivation, they speak to Jesus’ current self. “Get away from here” — *now!* “Herod wants to kill you” — *today!*

Most of us would panic if we heard such a message. We would drop everything and run for our lives. But Jesus put his future self in charge. “Go and tell that fox for me,” he says, “‘I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work’” (v. 32). Jesus had a plan: Today and tomorrow, cast out demons and perform cures; in three days, finish his work. Jesus put his future self in control, not Herod.

Jesus cand do this because he knows that *his* future aligns with *God’s* future. “I must be on my way,” he says to the Pharisees, “because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem” (v. 33). Jerusalem is a holy city, the site of Israel’s temple, the center of her religious life. It is also a city with a history of violence toward God’s prophets: the prophet Uriah is slain with a sword in Jerusalem (Jeremiah 26:20-23). The prophet Zechariah is stoned to death in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 24:21). The prophet Isaiah is sawn in half in Jerusalem (Hebrews 11:37). Jesus knew he would die in Jerusalem, just as many prophet before him died there, and just as his follower Stephen would be stoned to death there (Acts 7:54-60).

Soon after Peter boldly declared Jesus to be God’s promised Messiah, Jesus told the disciples that he must “undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Luke 9:22). Jesus always looked to the future. Remember, the more certain the future is, the more power it has. Jesus knew he *must* suffer and be killed, and on the third day be raised. This made his future powerful.

After stating his intention to travel to Jerusalem, Jesus offered a lament over the city, a passionate expression of sorrow. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!” he cried out. “How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Luke 13:34). The prospect of a terrible fate in Jerusalem did not mean that Jesus hated its people. Instead, he desired to show them motherly love and protection, much like a hen sheltering her chicks in a time of danger.

Jesus showed compassion for the people, even though the people turned away from him. Jesus predicted that the same people who cheered him on Palm Sunday, cheering “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord” (Luke 13:35), would be the same people would later that shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” (Luke 23:21). Every step of the way, Jesus focused on God’s work for our future. On good days and bad, this forward-looking orientation gave Jesus great power and courage to do God’s work.

So, what is the message for us, as we make our way through the season of Lent? How might things be different if we put our future selves in charge, both as individual disciples and as a faithful congregation? This passage is a reminder that we need to live each day with a focus on the crucifixion and resurrection, just as Jesus did. We keep the crucifixion in our future by remembering that Jesus said, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). Keeping the cross in front of us means that we focus on service to our neighbors, following a Lord who “came not to be served but to serve” (Matthew 20:28).

The American writer Jay Parini says, “Jesus never meant to found a formal church with rituals and organized practices, to ordain priests, or to issue doctrinaire statements that formed a rigid program for salvation. Other than ‘follow me,’ his only commandment was ‘to love one another as I have loved you.’” When we follow Jesus, we keep crucifixion in our future. When we love one another, we practice the self-giving love that Jesus demonstrated when he died for us. The cross shows just how far Jesus will go to show us how much he loves us. As faithful disciples, we move toward the cross when we love each other with a Christ-like love. As a faithful congregation, we focus on crucifixion when we measure our success in terms of feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, healing the sick, visiting prisoners, and welcoming strangers (Matthew 25:35-36).

With the cross in our future, we are filled with great power; but the crucifixion is not the end of the story. Jesus moved from cross to empty tomb, from death to resurrection, and so can we. The path to the empty tomb is a journey to new life. When our future self is focused on resurrection, it is open to transformation. Jesus “wished for us to experience a change of heart…” says Parini, “…a shift into a larger consciousness, a life-enhancing awareness of the mind of God.”

With the image of the empty tomb in our minds, we can expect to be changed. This means becoming people who can forgive others because we are forgiven by God. We can welcome strangers because we are welcomed by Christ. We can act boldly because we are filled with the power of God’s Spirit. With a focus on resurrection, we know that nothing in all creation, not even death itself, “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39).

For most of us, a focus on the present day keeps us trapped in fear, suspicion, and resentment; but a focus on the day of resurrection opens endless, new possibilities. As individuals, we can forgive, welcome, and act in ways that we never thought possible. As a congregation, we can put aside our institutional worries and boldly share the grace, love, healing, and hope of Jesus Christ.

The ministry of Jesus reminds us that if we put too much focus on our current self, we short-change ourselves and our church. When we put our future self in charge, focusing on crucifixion and resurrection, we can love one another with sacrificial love and experience new and liberating life. In this season of Lent, let’s keep our focus on the future that matters to Jesus.

Prayer: Ever-Living God, thank You for all that You provide for us in a time when the future looks so bleak. Let us never forget that our citizenship is in heaven and that no matter what happens in life, while we remain on earth You are in control, and Your promise to care for us is assured. Help us to live lives that are pleasing to You; and help us not to put our hope and trust in the leaders of this world nor in the things of this world that are passing away. May we always remember that our hope is built on nothing less that Jesus and His righteousness. God, You know the end from the beginning, and that You are truly in control of all that happens. Not only in our lives but in every corner of the world. Guide, protect and supply for the needs of all Your children. We thank You that in Jesus Christ our future is secure, no matter what may take place in the world. All praise Your Glorious name, and thanks for Your loving kindness. Amen.

**Sources:**

* Parini, Jay. *Jesus: The Human Face of God*(Boston: New Harvest, 2013), 152.
* Sundem, Garth. “Your Future Self Knows Best.” *Psychology Today,*March 30, 2012, www.psychologytoday.com.

**Your Future Self**

Sunday, March 13, 2022  [Luke 13:31-35](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+13%3a31-35&language=en&version=NIV)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Imagine yourself 10 pounds thinner. Imagine yourself with no credit card debt. Imagine yourself speaking a foreign language. Your *current self*, the person you are right here, right now, cannot achieve these goals. But your *future self*can do it. So why not put your future self in charge?

Katherine Milkman is a behavioral economist at the Wharton School. She studies how daily decisions are affected by whether the current self or the future self is making the choices. None of us can hop into a time machine and jump into the future; but we *can* decide to make choices with a focus on the current day…or a future day.

Milkman explored how people buy groceries online. Specifically, she looked at what people order when they buy for next-day delivery, compared with what they order for delivery three days in the future. The current self buys for next-day delivery. The future self buys for three days in the future. What she found is that people spend more money when they buy for immediate consumption, and they tend to purchase less nutritious food. “If you buy for rush,” says Milkman*,*“you buy junk.” Your current self buys pop and potato chips which taste great right now! Your future self buys whole grains and raw vegetables. When you plan to eat better in the future, you buy food that supports a nutritious diet.

Your future self is much more rational and restrained than your current self. Your future self wants to benefit from a balanced diet, while your current self will eat anything that tastes good. Your future self wants to have zero credit card debt, while your current self wants to buy that new outfit. Your future self wants to learn a foreign language, while your current self gets bored after 15 minutes of an instruction program.

So, what can you do? *Put your future self in charge!* Make a grocery list and stick to it. Pay down your debt each month. Spend 30 minutes a day on language study. No exceptions! “The more certain the future is,” says Sundem Garth in a *Psychology Today* article*,*“the more power it has.” So, make the future certain. Give it power in your life. Put your future self in charge of your current, daily decisions!