

Luke 13:31-35 (NRSV)

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."

[32] He said to them,

"Go and tell that fox for me,

'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.

[33] Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.'

[34] Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

[35] See, your house is left to you.

And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say,

'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.' "

THE FOX

Our lesson for today begins with a warning from the religious leaders, the Pharisees. They tell Jesus, "You better watch out. King Herod knows about you, and he wants to kill you."

There was ample reason to be afraid of Herod. He had already beheaded John the Baptist. Matthew's gospel tells us that Herod even wondered if Jesus might be John the Baptist returned from the dead. (Matthew 14:1-2)

Herod had a guilty conscience. And anyone this paranoid is clearly unpredictable and dangerous. Maybe the Pharisees are right. Maybe it would be prudent for Jesus to just run away and live to preach another day.

But, Jesus did not run. Instead, Jesus responded to that warning by saying,

"Go tell Herod, that fox, "I've got work to do. I'm going to be right here doing that work these next few days. I will be healing people as a sign of the coming kingdom, and then on the third day I'm going to resume my journey to Jerusalem."

In other words, Jesus was throwing down the gauntlet. The Pharisees said that Herod had threatened to kill Jesus. Jesus responded by giving Herod his schedule!

If you want me, here I am. Come and get me.

Herod thought that he was the Lion of Judah; Jesus said that he was a fox, a worthless pest who threatened barnyard animals. Jesus said, "I don't have time for you. You're not that important. My destiny lies in Jerusalem."

THE HEN

Jesus then describes Jerusalem as "the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!" Why on earth would Jesus want to go to a place like that?

Jesus traveled to Jerusalem out of love.

His motive is revealed in the image he used. He was like a mother hen wanting to protect her chicks. He wanted to take the people of Jerusalem under his arms and protect them.

The heart of God is a heart of compassion. What a wonderful word picture is drawn by the passage, the mother hen gathering her brood under her wings. In nature we learn how maternal instincts cause even the most ferocious of animals to be gentle with their young.

And this gentle maternal instinct that is woven into the very fabric of nature describes the heart of God. God longs to take us under God's wings and care for us gently.

GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE

But, often we reject that care. And that causes us needless pain. And it causes God pain as well.

Jesus goes to Jerusalem as an ambassador of God's wondrous love. But, Jesus knows even when he is far from Jerusalem that this love will be rejected.

It is one thing to love someone who returns your love. It is quite another thing to love someone who rejects your love. That's the love of God, the love that will not let us go.

Jesus laments the fact that his love for Jerusalem will be rejected, but that does not deter him from going to Jerusalem.

You see, Jesus is the human expression of God's steadfast love, and the steadfast love of God is not deterred by the faithless ways of His children. The

steadfast love of God is not deterred by the threats of crazy kings. In fact nothing can deter the steadfast love of God

The Apostle Paul said that it all boils down to this. God is for us. And nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love. (Romans 8:31-38)

The Old Testament book of Lamentations puts it this way, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. The mercies of God never come to an end. Each day brings a new expression of God's love and care." (Lamentations 3:22-23)

And even when God's love is nailed to a cross, that love does not end. Indeed, after the dark night of the crucifixion there will come the brightest morning of mercy the world has ever seen.

Jesus knows what is coming. Jesus foresees the rejection of his people. Jesus foresees his crucifixion outside of Jerusalem. Jesus knows the high cost of love.

But, Jesus refuses to run away. Jesus stands between the helpless ones and those who would destroy them. Jesus, like a good mother hen, gives his life so that his little ones might escape. He spreads his wings on a cross.

THE THIRD DAY

How can Jesus be so courageous in the face of such overwhelming odds?

I think it is because Jesus also foresees the miracle of the "Third Day." The Third Day ultimately will be the day of resurrection. (Luke 13:32)

On that Day people will truly see Jesus. They will rejoice in the salvation of God. They will cry,

"Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord." (Luke 13:35)

And it is this hope that gives Jesus the strength to make the long journey to Jerusalem. It is this hope that gives Jesus the courage to spread his protective wings in sacrifice.

THE PROPHETS OF FEAR

When the Pharisees came to Jesus with their warning about Herod, I think they had an ulterior motive. They were trying to manipulate Jesus with fear.

"Run away Jesus. King Herod is crazy, and he's powerful."

(They didn't like what Jesus was saying and they thought that the fear of crazy King Herod might cause him to retreat.)

Today some religious and political leaders use this same approach. They say, "Be very afraid of what's coming next. Give us money and vote for us or the consequences could be dire."

But, these doomsday prophets are not God's prophets. They are foxes, useless predators who make their livelihood by preying upon the weakest among us. They try to control us and stay in power by using our fears against us.

Even as I wrote those words I received a call on my phone. An automated voice said,

"Hello, the FBI reports there is a home break-in every fifteen minutes."

I didn't wait for the rest of the message. I knew what was coming next. They would try to sell me something based upon my fear of what might happen.

The Pharisees, the prophets of fear still come to us, and they tell us to run away from the things that would destroy us. Today the prophets of fear even have their own news channel. (In fact they have several news channels.)

They remind us that the world is filled with danger. Just a bit of ice or a few cells dividing the wrong way can cause us to lose everything.

Facebook is going to let strangers have our personal information, more at 11! Be sure to tune in so that you can protect yourself!

We have become so accustomed to the daily litany of potential disasters that we don't notice that we are in a prison created by our own fears. Fear has made our life less than it should be.

The Bible has a lot to say about fear.

Mainly the Bible tells us to just say "no" to fear. Fear not.

The Bible tells us that God's love casts out fear and enables us to care for our brother and sister. (See 1 John 4:18-21)

LIVING BY FAITH INSTEAD OF FEAR

To put it another way, Christians live by faith instead of fear.

Christians live by standing on the promises of God. Christians live by loving what God loves. Christians live by becoming a part of the kingdom of God, the kingdom that is revealed by the life of Jesus.

Jesus did not succumb to the temptation of the Pharisees. Jesus did not quit healing and teaching so that he could run away and play it safe.

Instead, Jesus directly challenged the legitimacy of the powers that be. And I think that Jesus also calls us to challenge the legitimacy of those who prey upon our fears.

I think we sometimes conveniently forget that the good news preached by Jesus was good news with a sharp edge. Jesus never hesitated to confront injustice with God's truth.

Instead of running away at the first sign of danger Jesus led the fight for justice and righteousness at every turn. He lifted up the cause of those who were oppressed and brought healing to those whom society had rejected as unimportant.

Jesus would not change course for a fox like Herod. Jesus would continue his mission. Jesus would drive out demons today and heal people tomorrow because He believed there would always be a "third day."

There would be a resurrection. There would be a time when his ministry would be vindicated, and the forces of evil would be decisively defeated.

We too are called to live in the hope of that third day, the hope of the resurrection. Like Jesus we are called to do each day what God calls us to do.

It may seem like evil is getting the upper hand. We may feel threatened by the actions of those in power.

But, we cannot be diverted from following Jesus.

We too are called to proclaim the good news of the kingdom in word and deed.

We too are called to speak truth to power.

We too are called to bring healing and hope to those that the world has forgotten.

We too are called to be courageous because we believe in the Third Day of victory.

We believe that when all is said and done the forces of evil and death will be defeated. The Herods of the world will not win. God will win.

And that is why we do not give up on anyone or any situation.

MERCY FOR THE DISFIGURED

The news program Sixty Minutes ran a story about a hospital ship that visits various ports in Africa. This ship specializes in helping people who have severe facial deformities.

These are extreme cases, and the people with these disabilities live miserable lives.

The villagers say these deformed individuals are “cursed” and they reject them totally. They refer to them as garbage.

But, the people on this ship do not see these people as garbage.

One of the first things they do when the disfigured person comes on the ship is take them by the hand, look them in the eye and say, “I see you.” That’s the native way of saying, “There is more to you than your disfigured face. And I am going to help you.”

It’s amazing how much these doctors are able to do. And once the problem of these disfigured people is mitigated they are often able to live more normal lives.

One of the cosmetic surgeons said that he signed up to do a six-month tour and now he has been doing surgery on that ship for over 20 years.

The surgeon got married and had a family all while living in a 600 square foot cabin on his floating home. His children haven’t been back to the United States long enough to even call it home.

The surgeon’s wife, a nurse on this ship was asked if she felt like she had given up too much to live this life of service. And she said,

“Oh no. You don’t understand. Helping these people has given my life meaning. I wouldn’t trade this life for anything.”

Why do these people give up so much to treat people on the other side of the world? The reporters could not help but notice that it was faith.

This hospital ship was a Christian ship, and the doctors and nurses prayed for their patients before surgery. The crew of that ship gladly served in the name of their Savior. In fact many of the people on the ship served at their own expense.

In a situation that was painful and full of fear their faith in God made a big difference. Instead of being distracted by all of the obstacles, they were able to focus on the hope of the Third Day.

They saw resurrection where most saw only despair and superstition.

THE KINGDOM THAT COMES

Jesus has a new vision for us to proclaim. He invites us to imagine the kingdom that comes.

In that kingdom instead of dividing people with fear, people will be united with hope.

When the kingdom comes people will come from all over the world to Jerusalem. They will come from east and west ... north and south ... to eat at God's table of grace.

In that kingdom the world's values will be turned upside down. Some who are first will be last and some who are last will be first. In God's kingdom those whom society has written off will be lifted up.

The widows, debtors, sinners, tax collectors and little children are elevated, and the big shots like Herod are in for a big fall. (Luke 13:29-30)

Of course the big shots don't like that. But, Jesus is not modifying his mission to please the big shots.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem where the prophets were stoned. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem for a showdown with the powers of evil. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to be crucified by the same people he came to save.

I think that Jesus is an example for us.

God has not necessarily called us to be successful, always giving the people a word that they want to hear while running at the first sign of trouble.

Instead God has called us to be faithful. God has called us to go boldly into the lion's den and speak the truth in love.

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper with its disturbing symbols of death and sacrifice reminds us of who we are and what we are called to be.

His body was broken for us. His blood was shed for us.

And as he has served us, we are called to serve others in his name.

I think that one way we serve him is by taking his little ones under our wing.

We serve him by having the courage to speak truth to power.

We serve him by believing in the power of the Third Day even when all around us there are prophets of doom and gloom.

Friends, don't listen to those who say that we should fear Herod and all that he represents. Don't listen to your fear.

Instead have the courage to tell the truth in love. Listen to the words of our Savior, who tells us as he serves us the symbols of his sacrifice,

"Do this in remembrance of me."

That means more than just taking communion.

It means serving others as Christ has first served us. It is a call to stretch out our arms in compassion. It means daring to sacrifice in his name. It is a call to take up our cross and follow Him in ministry.

If we to do this, we will begin to see a whole new world coming. We too will be able to cheer as Jesus enters Jerusalem. And we will shout with joy,

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

Amen.