

Luke 13:31-35

13:31 At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."

13:32 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.

13:33 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.'

13:34 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!

13:35 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.'"

Sermon:

We rarely find it difficult to imagine Jesus in our modern context: Yes of course, Jesus could preach from a soapbox in Moore Square; Yes of course, Jesus would be delighted to chair the church building committee and offer input on paint and carpet samples; Yes of course, Jesus' favorite hymn is *Great is Thy Faithfulness*. Yes, of course, Jesus is a prototypical Christian, a privileged and wealthy American, a member of the Kiwanis Club and a dues-payer in the Chamber of Commerce.

And Jesus definitely made banana pudding for today's potluck, and not with box pudding either!

We find it much more difficult to conjure the image of Jesus in his *actual* context. A day-laborer in an isolated colony. A faith rooted in Judaism. Jesus is steeped in Torah, invested in the Temple Cult, an annual pilgrim to the religious festivals, and deeply connected to the worship of YHWH. Therefore, Jerusalem is his absolute center just as Raleigh and Washington would be for us today.

More context. The Temple housed the Holy of Holies, the most sacred space imaginable. Tucked within the vast expanse of the Temple, removed from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, and absent human presence 364 days a year (the Day of Atonement being the one exclusion), is the very breath of God. Think about that. Really think about that! The ruach that birthed creation and rattled Mount Sinai and willed a covenant into existence – God's breath – resides in the very center of the Temple, in the very center of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is gravity itself for every person in the region.

Jesus loves Jerusalem. Jesus loves the practice of Judaism. Jesus loves the people of Jerusalem. Jesus, like so many prophets before him, longs to see Jerusalem turn toward God. Jesus grieves Rome's influences, distortions, and cruelties.

Another point. Please don't demonize Pharisees. Yes, there are a few who have strong disagreements with Jesus, but their intent is pure. I'd remind you the disciples had some disagreements with Jesus, too. The Pharisees, just like Jesus, overwhelmingly reject Rome's intent to Romanize Judaism. The Pharisees are the ancestors of modern Judaism.

In this text, the Pharisees are warning Jesus about the danger of Herod with genuine concern and collegiality.

Let's be crystal clear before engaging today's text: Jesus is not seeking to reject Judaism. Jesus does not view Pharisees as his mortal enemy. To believe otherwise is to project a distorted present upon a reimagined past.

To the text!

The Pharisees warn Jesus: "Hey man, Herod wants to kill you. Be careful out here. Keep moving."

Jesus, responds to the Pharisees:

I know, and thanks for your concern.

*But here's the thing, I don't answer to Herod's authority.
I only answer to God's authority. And I'm not following Herod's
timeline, I'm following the one that God is laying out for me.*

*Herod thinks he's sly, thinks I don't know his game. But there are
people to heal, friends to join in ministry, scriptures to be revealed,
community to be experienced. I'm gonna keep on doing my thing.*

Jesus is reminding the Pharisees and all who read Luke's gospel that he's living wholly and fully for God. He's past the point of being concerned about his own safety and comfort, and he's much more concerned about the convictions of his calling.

I believe that's a hard path for us to imagine in 2025 in the safety of a sanctuary. For me, Jesus' path recalls figures like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Both persons have a deep love of place and country, and deep convictions for their own people to hear truth in the present, to find repentance and transformation.

At some point, both persons realize that if they keep going down the path they are treading, it's gonna lead toward death. And yet they choose to look beyond the certainty of death toward something bigger and bolder. King's most powerful speech is on the national mall in Washington, D.C. Bonhoeffer, despite safety and a public platform in America, returns to Germany. Prophets speak in the places they love, in the places that are their center, in places that provide gravity.

Jesus says, "I'm going to Jerusalem. On my terms. My voice will be heard and my work's gonna get done."

And here's where that metaphor of mother hen is so poignant. We know about the mama eagle who teaches her babies to fly over her outstretched wings. She's their safety net. The mama hen uses her wings to enfold her children, no matter the threat. If the fox enters the henhouse, mama will gather her chicks in her wings and use her claws and beak to fight ferociously. She will not flee. She will not surrender. She will sacrifice her life for theirs.

It should also be noted that in ancient Greece, the hen was a profound symbol of motherhood. Not just for her protective instincts, but also for her affection.

Herod sees power in craftiness, in attacking what is weaker. Jesus sees power in love, in protecting what is vulnerable.

Jesus loves Jerusalem fiercely and affectionately. He will work his way there. And when he arrives, the people will proclaim, “Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord.”

I suppose, for me, this text begs the question, “What is it that we’re waiting for in this season of Lent?”

We know by now who Jesus is. We know where Jesus is headed. We even *think* we know what to expect when Jesus arrives upon that hill and we sing our loud hosannas. I sure do hope we won’t let our expectations muddy the meaning of the season. I sure do hope we won’t let what *we think we know* become the enemy of *all that we can know*.

I’m drawn back to the Holy of Holies. Richard W. Swanson reminds us that there was one day a year, Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement, when one priest was allowed to enter this sacred spot. The priest would emerge from the Temple, proclaiming the name of God to the people – the name of mercy, the name of unending love, the name of every possibility – and the speaking of God’s name represented a new creation. A world healed, ready to once more be God’s world.

I’m amazed by this concept. There’s no busier place than Jerusalem. The markets, the people, the rituals, the movements, the comings and goings. And yet there was silence in one sacred space. And from that silence, one word, one expression of God, could recenter their very existence. At least for a day.

And it makes me think of Sundays at Millbrook. More than 100 people are gathered in this room. Disconnected from devices. Focused on one purpose: the praise of our Creator. That’s no small thing. How many

Timeline
Second Sunday of Lent, 3/16/2025
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other times in a week do we give an hour of intention to connection, or community, or to discovering a deeper purpose?

Buoyed by his community of faith, enriched by its traditions, inspired by the truth of Torah, Jesus believed in the possibilities of a still small voice that could silence the busyness of the world with the annual hope of possibilities: God's name spoken and experienced. God's kin-dom come. God's will done. Now.

It seems to me that Jesus is gonna head down that hill, not to invite us into a new creation once a year, but to make a new creation we can experience every day.

When we emerge from the silence of this Sabbath, or the silence of this season, or from the silence generated from a rolled-away stone, what path will we trod, what creation will we seek? Will we worry about the whims of sly foxes, or will we be drawn into the loving wings of a brooding hen?

Blessed is the One who comes in the name of Lord. May we be ready when They arrive. And may we follow Them.

Amen.