

## “Go Tell That Fox!”

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BASED ON THE THEME, “A STRANGE PATH TO GLORY”

Arlington Congregational Church, U.C.C.

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### Luke 13:31-35

<sup>31</sup>At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.”

<sup>32</sup>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. <sup>33</sup>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.’

<sup>34</sup>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!

<sup>35</sup>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.’”

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**J**erusalem is a violent, dangerous place. It is run by the political and religious authorities, not the citizens. The Roman political authorities are there by violence and they use violence and the threat of violence to maintain control. Public executions are common, and it doesn't take much to earn one.

The religious leaders talk about Jerusalem as a holy city, but it doesn't act like one. The religious authorities are theologically fundamentalist and in league with the political authorities to maintain the status quo. They each use each other to control the people rather than to do what God intended the political and religious systems of the world to do. They know if the boat starts rocking the political authorities will use the military and every other power in their arsenal to crush the people and with

that would go the religious authorities' power and prestige. This wasn't confined to Jesus' time either.

Throughout its history Jerusalem has been a violent, dangerous place. Before the Romans there were the Babylonians, the Assyrians, and the Egyptians. Pagan Romans did violence to Jews, Jews to Christians, Christians to Muslims and Jews and Muslims to Christians and Jews, all in the name of one god or another.

Herod is called king, but he is little more than a puppet for the Romans and an annoyance to the religious powers – that – be. Herod's father before him was a violent, vain man. He is alleged to have killed hundreds of babies when it was rumored a new “King of the Jews” had been born. So this Herod's threat to Jesus is nothing new. He has already killed Jesus' cousin John for criticizing

his marriage to his own sister-in-law, which was against religious law at the time.

Herod struts and crows and wants to be a lion, but Jesus calls him a fox. He is cunning and dangerous, like a fox in a henhouse, but he is no lion of Zion. He is a more of a Foxy Loxy thinking only of his own pleasure, power, and prestige, ready to lead anyone he can into his den to eat them. Now he is worried because Jesus seems to be rocking the boat. People are taking notice and talking about God at work, but Herod knows the Romans don't want to hear God-talk unless it is proclaiming Caesar as god. So Herod has reportedly put the hit out on Jesus and the religious stoolpigeons have come to warn Jesus.

While Herod may be a fox, Jesus is the true Lion of Judah. He is not daunted by the threats of violence and assassination. He is working. Jesus is the one working in the midst of the people fighting evil and healing suffering. He says, "Tell that fox that I am casting out demons and performing cures." Jesus is doing the work of God - casting out evil and curing the suffering of his people. He has not arrived in that dangerous and violent city of Jerusalem yet, but already its threats of violence and danger have come out to threaten Jesus for doing the work of God.

Jesus knows Jerusalem may not be a Holy City, but he also knows he will go there. He will go there with compassion and with dread. He knows that there is evil and there is suffering in Jerusalem. He knows that Jerusalem may call itself

Holy, but it has rejected the holiness of every prophet and apostle that has come to it. He goes weeping for the people of Jerusalem who suffer from this history and tendency to do violence and cause destruction. The sad part is that they are often willing co-conspirators by the things they do and the things they don't do.

Although some people protested Rome's authority, I would guess many of them looked at Rome as a form of security. After all, it was the greatest empire in history. Their military might "protected" Jerusalem from other dangerous nations or terrorist states. I suspect many agreed with the religious leaders because they thought certainty and rules both in politics and in religion made them feel safe. If you are not on the absolute bottom and completely powerless to change your situation your fear is that if things change you will be.

The world is less ambiguous if we know who to hate and as long as you are not the leper, outsider, woman, or some other "abomination" who suffers the injustice and hatred. Hating others keeps us from hating our own circumstance as much.

Into this mess, this mix, this muddle comes Jesus. Is it any wonder he wept as he thought about the warning of the Pharisees? But what is interesting is that he doesn't weep for himself, he weeps for us. He weeps because he knows that in our violent and dangerous ways we are harming ourselves. A society that kills its prophets to protect the status quo or to keep God out fails. It

fails not because it doesn't keep some code of holy behavior that focuses on other people's sins. Every society in history has ultimately failed. The prophets warned Israel and their warnings still stand today to every nation, not just to Israel. Every society has failed because it failed to uphold God's vision of love and justice for every creature and every part of creation. The Creator does not take kindly when humans abuse what he created. Whether that is abuse of God's children or the creation which he gave us that we might have life, God knows that any society that does not honor God will fail. Jesus did not weep for himself but for those who suffered because of Israel's inability to hear and do God's vision.

Jesus doesn't weep out of fear for his own safety. He is quite clear that his destiny is a cross. He knows the fate of all prophets who lift up the love and justice of God. He weeps for the people of Jerusalem. He weeps for those who are both the victims and perpetrators of the hate and the injustice. So he says to the Chicken Little Pharisees who want to warn him about Foxy Loxy to go tell that fox, "I am working." This is the good news for us today as we travel this strange path to glory by way of the same cross that awaited Jesus in Jerusalem.

What good news, you ask? It is good news because Jesus' path to Jerusalem was a path to death and also to life. Even more, it is good news that Jesus has, in one sense, finished his work. This is the strange path we travel in Lent. It is both an already – finished and a not-yet-finished journey. Jesus has

already gone to Jerusalem and Herod and Pilate and the powers-that-be have killed him. They thought he was finished. But this strange path of Lent reminds us that our destination goes by way of the cross but it doesn't stop there. Jesus says, "It is finished" when he dies on the cross, and in a strange way it is. He has defeated the powers that live by hate and injustice. But let's be honest; on this strange path hate and injustice still appear to rule. They still appear to decide the fate of things. Yet this strange path leads us past the "right now" to "Easter," to resurrection, to new life, to the promise that God will finish the work and bring about a new reality of love and justice for all creation. The good news of the gospel is that God is still working and the strange path we are on leads us to where he will finish his work.

So I say, share the good news. When you are tempted to despair over the hatred and injustice in our present day Jerusalem, take heart in Jesus' words. It is good news that He is working. He is casting out evil and he is healing the suffering. When you think the foxes and the wolves have won remember that Jesus said, "Go tell that fox I am still working and nothing will stop me until I am finished." So take heart that Jesus is still working because his work is not finished, and share the good news with those who have lost their voice, or lost their way, or lost their hope.

Take heart and keep traveling the strange path of faith because the choice for us is whether we will continue on this strange path with God or give in to the

powers of Herod and Pilate and Caesar and any practice of religion that sustains hate and ignores injustice. Will we shut up and let Herod have his way? Will we allow the Pharisees warnings scare us away? Will we quit on the path that God calls us to follow?

I say no. Let's go tell that fox that Jesus is still working. I say let's go tell that fox who judges other people's sins that Jesus is still at work loving those they hate. I say let's go tell those foxes that think politics is about winning that Jesus is still at work casting out evil and calling governments to govern justly. I say let's go tell any fox who ignores the suffering of others that Jesus is still working and won't quit until there are people governing justly for all rather than selfishly for the few. I say let's go tell the foxes that try to convince us to be Chicken Little and run around scared of the falling sky that Jesus is still at work and he will not quit until he is finished! I tell you Jesus is still working, not because the outcome is in doubt but because there are those who doubt the outcome. God's love and justice will prevail because hatred and injustice have already been defeated because Jesus went to Jerusalem.

God is still willing to gather his children under his wings like the hen gathers her brood. The question is, are we willing? Are we willing to trust God's purpose and path or are we going to stick with Pilate and Herod and the Pharisees? Either way, says Jesus, "Your house is left to you."

At the end of this strange little scene is a strange little ending. Jesus says, "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.'" Scholars note this is the verse used when Jesus comes into Jerusalem for the week of his arrest, trial, and execution. Scholars also note this is a quote from the Psalms. So some suggest Jesus is just saying he is getting ready to go underground until he arrives in Jerusalem for that fateful week.

I would suggest we can also hear it as an assurance for those of us waiting today. There will come a time when we will shout what those folks shouted that first Palm Sunday. It will be the day that what Jesus worked at and finished in his day comes in its fullness in our day. It is that which we are called to join in. If Jesus walked a strange path to glory, we are to join him on that path. It is a path lined with crosses and detours and speed bumps, but it will not stop the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Let us join him on that path and keep working for the love and justice of God even in the face of those who cry wolf and in the face of the very real wolves that make our world as violent and dangerous as Jerusalem.

Until that time, let us keep telling the foxes and wolves that God is still working. Then one day we too shall join the glad shout – "Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!" Amen.