

Last week we heard about Jesus suffering for 40 days in the wilderness while being tempted by Satan, who was trying to prey on his weakness and vulnerability.

Today, we have another story in which Jesus encounters danger, this time it's not Satan, but real and present danger in the form of Herod, a ruler in Jerusalem.

Jesus is on the move from one town to another, teaching, preaching and performing miracles as he goes, he's on his way to Jerusalem.

During his journey, some Pharisees warn him about Herod in Jerusalem and tell him not to go there because Herod wants to kill him.

Now, the Pharisees are usually known for having allegiances with the Roman Empire and their power structure, they benefit from being on good terms with the Roman rulers, like Herod.

And, it's said that many Pharisees, who were high priests, were threatened by Jesus and his teachings.

But this wasn't one-sided; Jesus also called them out for having their priorities mixed up.

Because of their dicey relationship, it's very surprising that some Pharisees defect from their loyalty to the Empire and decide to warn Jesus about Herod.

Perhaps Jesus knows better than to trust their word, because he ignores their warning, and he proceeds to call Herod a fox.

Then, he foreshadows his death and resurrection when he says that he is casting out demons today, tomorrow and will finish his work on the 3rd day, akin to how he was killed and resurrected on the 3rd day.

Lastly, he moves on to what is possibly the most heart-breaking part of the story, in which he laments Jerusalem's lack of faith, their history of killing prophets, and his desire to help them and their unwillingness to comply.

He offers a beautiful, maternal comparison of himself as a mother hen who is trying to gather her brood under her wings to protect them, but they just won't obey.

Jesus has such grief and anguish over Jerusalem because it's the city that he loves, and he knows what it's capable of and it's falling short of its potential and Jesus is powerless to stop its destructive ways.

Jerusalem is supposed to be the center of religious and spiritual life.

The predominant Jewish theology was that the presence of God in the Temple was the final fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham.

And yet, Jesus cries out, *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!"* (Luke 13:34)

Because Jerusalem, the supposedly sacred city did kill prophets.

It killed Uriah, Zechariah, and under the rule of King Manasseh lots of prophets were killed there, and some even say that he was responsible for the killing of the Prophet Isaiah.

Then, the Jerusalemites continue to kill prophets even after Jesus' death.

Stephen was an early Christian and in the book of Acts, he tells the people in Jerusalem, *“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are for ever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do.*

Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute?

They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers.

You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it.’ (Acts 7: 51-53)

Right after he says this, the crowd became enraged and stoned him to death.

Theologian Walter Brueggemann recalled the prophet Jeremiah in the Hebrew Bible and he recalls his relationship with Jerusalem, saying that Jeremiah *“looks the city square in the face and notices the cadences of its death march,”* (Mandate to Difference: An Invitation to the Contemporary Church, pg. 36).

Jerusalem is in bad shape, and yet, this is where Jesus has his lived history.

After Jesus was born, he was presented in the Temple, as was the Jewish custom.

This is where Joseph and Mary met the wise man named Simeon.

It had been revealed to Simeon that he wouldn't die before seeing the Lord's Messiah, and upon seeing the baby Jesus, he took Jesus in his arms and praised God and said that he could be dismissed because his eyes had seen God's salvation in Jesus.

And at 12 years old, this is where Jesus stayed behind after the Passover feast to learn from the teachers.

So, Jesus had some very poignant, powerful experiences in Jerusalem, specifically in the Temple.

It's a scared place in his life and in the lives of his fellow, faithful Jewish people.

It's one thing to lament people who are doing awful things whom you have no relationship with or connection to.

It's a wholly other thing to lament and mourn the evil actions of people whom you know and love, a people who you know can do better, who are better than how they're behaving.

Jesus' cries of anguish and frustration remind me of a mother who knows what's best for her children, who wants what's best for them,

who has done everything she can to help them live into their potential, and she has to watch them squander every opportunity they've given.

Jesus tried to help them, but they wouldn't accept it.

I tried to gather you under my wing, but you were not willing!

This story is a painful reminder of a mantra that I try to live by, which is: *the only person in the world that we can change, is ourselves.*

I know it can be heartbreaking to watch a loved one be destructive to themselves or others.

Our love and compassion compels us to want to do something for them, and we do everything we can and they still don't change and that is frustrating beyond explanation.

I almost wonder if Jesus' self-sacrificial model of loving Jerusalem is not the healthiest example for us to follow.

I struggle with it, because on the one hand, it's incredibly noble.

“Jesus marches to Jerusalem and embraces the cross that awaits him there out of profound love for the people around him, a mother's fierce love that will stop at nothing to protect her children.” (www.davidlose.net, “Lent 2 C: Courage and Vulnerability”)

But on the other hand, I would never recommend that anyone lose their lives for the sake of another who isn't willing to help themselves.

I'd never tell a mother that the most loving thing she can do is to nearly kill herself for her children.

Since every life is sacred, I'm not convinced that it's faithful to sacrifice our own lives- whether literally or metaphorically, for the sake of someone else who isn't heeding our help or guidance.

Maybe this is what makes us different from Jesus.

He had the courage and conviction to give up his life for people who weren't deserving of the sacrifice, I don't recommend that you follow suit.

Because the truth of the matter is that *we can only change ourselves.*

We can die trying to change others, but there's no guarantee that it will work.

I think it's more faithful to live with love and compassion for others, while making sure that we take care of ourselves so that we can be our best selves for our loved ones and the world.

We are called to be Jesus' faithful disciples, bearers of his good news in this hurting world.

We can't be those light-bearers if we allow our light to go out for the sake of others whom we are trying to fix.

For those of you who have a tendency to be self-sacrificial, you aren't alone.

The church does it too.

We sacrifice our wider cause for the desires of a few.

We give up our prophetic, radical nature in exchange for social acceptance.

Jerusalem was supposed to be the holiest city.

The church is supposed to be the holiest place in town, and just like Jerusalem, we fall short too.

We are supposed to be the place where people to go be refilled, refreshed and renewed, and sometimes we are the very reason people are drained.

Jesus describes Herod as a fox, someone who is sly, cunning and destructive.

I have wondered if the church universal hasn't sometimes acted like a wolf, or a fox, in sheep's clothing.

We proclaim justice, peace, acceptance and love, then we turn on the news and see that once again, scriptures are being used to harm, discriminate against and oppress people.

The church can be sly.

We say all are welcome, but lots of us have been in churches that say that, but what they mean is that you have to look like and act like, us, to be welcome.

Herod Antipas, the Herod in this story, is the successor to the evil Herod that we hear about in Jesus' birth story.

That Herod was the one who pronounced that all children under age 2 in Bethlehem should be killed because he was so threatened by this Prince of Peace that he just heard about.

This is the new Herod, equally ineffective at undoing God's plans.

He's also motivated by fear, power and security.

Herod wanted people to conform to the values of the Empire.

Jesus wanted people to stay faithful to God's ancient promises.

This is why Jesus' heart breaks for Jerusalem because the faithful city's allegiances have switched from God to Herod.

The church is called to stay faithful to God, to Christ's calling for us, to the Gospel message.

But we too are capable of being motivated by fear, power and security.

We make decisions not because they're what God is calling us to do but because we need to grow, because we are shrinking, and we are afraid because we think that bigger always means better in the church.

And suddenly decisions are made out of a place of fear and anxiety rather than faithfulness and trust in God.

Jesus wept for Jerusalem because he knew that they had departed so far from what God wanted from them, and he knew they were capable of being faithful but he was powerless to do anything about.

He couldn't force anyone to come under his wing.

I am sure that throughout the course of Christian history, God has grieved for the church because God knows what we are capable of and yet sometimes we stray so far from God's will for us, and perhaps God feels powerless to do anything about it.

We have the option of following God's will for us in our lives, it's our responsibility to heed God's call for us.

We have the choice, are we going to be little chicks that run away because we think we know better?

Or are we going to gather under the protective shelter of God's wing?

We can't change anyone but ourselves.

Every parent and person who has been in a relationship knows this.

But if we each choose to respond to God's call individually, we will have an entire community of faithful Christ-followers, and we will all be gathered under the protective shelter of God's wing.

Amen.