

Lent 2019  
**For God So Loved - 2**  
Luke 13:31-35

1. The Kingdom of God is a threat to power

- Nehemiah 6:11, 6:2-4; Psalm 138:6; Luke 1:52

2. Words to power from humble compassion

- Proverbs 27:6; Jeremiah 25:4; Matthew 11:28-30

3. Truth through death

- Luke 13:32-33

4. Love in the face of rejection

- Jeremiah 3:18-20; John 15:13; Luke 9:51

5. It's not the dying, it's the rising

- Luke 13:32-33; Hebrews 11:1; John 11:25-26

6. Speak love courageously

- Romans 1:16; 1 Peter 3:15-16

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## Lent 2019: For God So Loved 2<sup>1</sup> *Luke 13:31-35*

Those in power and those who are prophets have always had a contentious relationship throughout history. The Old Testament is filled with stories of prophets being chased away, running for their lives. Maybe you recall the story of Elijah, especially the time that he was hunted by Ahab and Jezebel. Or the time when the people told Jeremiah that his prophecies were lies and there were plans to kill him.

But there's something about prophets you should keep in mind: I think we've mistaken prophets to be people who tell the future, but they are not so much *fore* tellers as they are *forth* tellers. Prophets speak of the sin and evil that is *present*, and they warn what will happen in the *future* if things don't change. They also paint a picture of how great the future will be if there is repentance and obedience. We tend to think of prophets as tellers of the *future* when in fact they are tellers of the *truth*, revealing the heart of reality that those in power often don't want to hear or admit. Nathan the prophet revealed the heart of David when he pointed out David's adultery and murder, urging him to repent. Luckily for Nathan, *that* story ended well; David confessed, repented, and obeyed the Lord. But for many of the other prophets, when they revealed the heart of those in power it proved painful for the prophet and brought about the death of the prophet instead of repentance from those in power.

You don't have to dig too deeply to find that the harsh resistance that many in power have toward prophetic words goes beyond the pages of the Old Testament. Think about the horrible resistance to words preached by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; I remember watching those in power attacking and denigrating others during the American Civil Rights movement because they dared to speak up for justice, truth, and love. We read or can remember the vitriolic anger from leaders of the Third Reich who were questioned by people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer during the Nazi regime.

It doesn't take us long to realize that the powers of this world *like* to stay in power, and they often react violently when they are pushed to examine their motives. We see it in our entrenched politics today, with neither side willing to give up their power and often money.

But these are just a few examples of how people in power usually want to stay that way. Many of the times, both from Scripture and modern history, people have

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chosen to speak up for the ways of righteousness, love, and truth and have, in turn, been forced to fear for their livelihood or their lives.

Jesus is no exception to this type of reaction. As he travels, he is healing people, casting out demons, preaching freedom for the oppressed and a new kingdom. Those in control do not like these words. They react violently to these exposures and examinations of their hearts. They react critically to words that call for justice, peace, and compassion. They react with anger to Jesus' words about letting go of power and material wealth. Jesus is warned to leave or to face death by the hand of Herod.

But Jesus doesn't flee; in fact he keeps moving forward, *toward* the very seat of power: Jerusalem. Not only does he move closer to the city, but he also continues to do the things that have angered Herod in the first place: healing others, freeing the oppressed, and preaching a new kingdom. He doesn't move *away* from the threat; rather, he seeks to *embrace* it and is prepared to take the full-force brunt of it, saying he longs to gather the children of Jerusalem under his wings like a hen with her chicks. Though they reject his words and acts of liberation, Jesus loves people so much that he continues to speak truth to power, all the while knowing it will ultimately lead to his death. He keeps going forward, knowing it is not *death* that will have the final word but *resurrection*, and thus Jesus sets the example for us.

So let's make sure we get the full picture of what's happening here, so that we can fully appreciate and apply what God says to us in it. Let's start by seeing that...

## 1. The Kingdom of God is a ***threat to power***.

Jesus is preaching about the kingdom of God where the last shall be first, where the poor will be fulfilled, where there is rest, where people are not treated as a commodity to be used for profit, where every person is highly valued, where there is restoration, peace, and equality. Herod, however, was a person of control, wealth, and power—all things that Jesus spoke against.

This Herod, Herod Antipas, was the Herod who divorced his wife to marry the wife of his half-brother, and if you remember, when John the Baptist spoke against Herod's marriage to Herodias, it ultimately led to John's death by decapitation. This Herod was so bad that he is known for building a new capital city, Tiberius, on top of a Jewish graveyard. So he's certainly one whose power would be in the crosshairs of Jesus' preaching and teaching. But was Herod *really* after Jesus, like the Pharisees said? Was Herod really on the hunt for Jesus? And if he was, why would the Pharisees want to warn Jesus, anyway – didn't they want Jesus dead? Wasn't Jesus a threat to their religious power? Wouldn't that solve their problem, if they just let Herod kill Jesus?

You can tell that there's some political intrigue going on here.

So, first of all, we know from the story of Nicodemus in John 3 that not all of the Pharisees were bad; some of them supported Jesus, and so if Herod really *were* hunting for Jesus, the *good* Pharisees would've wanted to warn him. But on the

other hand, if these were the *bad* Pharisees, why would they warn Jesus? Well, it could be that they were trying to scare Jesus in order to get him on the run – then he would not be gathering supporters, and he would be discredited in front of his followers.

It reminds me of the story from the Old Testament book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was leading the Jews to rebuild the wall around the city of Jerusalem in order to re-establish the city as the center of God's people and their worship of God. But they had enemies who were threatened by the people of God becoming a community again, because the enemies would lose their power. So the Jews faced constant threats from their enemies, who tried several ploys to scare Nehemiah and get him to stop the work. Once, they had someone on the inside try to scare him into going into hiding in the Temple, which would make Nehemiah look like a coward and discredit him in front of the people. His response was:

“But I said, ‘Should a man like me run away? Or should someone like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!’” (Nehemiah 6:11, niv)

Another time, the enemies claimed that they wanted to negotiate with Nehemiah, if he would just stop the work and come out into the valley in order to meet with them. Nehemiah's response was:

“They were scheming to harm me; so I sent messengers to them with this reply: ‘I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?’ Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.” (Nehemiah 6:2-4, niv)

So *my* opinion is that it may or not have been that Herod was after Jesus, but that the Pharisees were taking a page out of the playbook of their own historical enemies, and they were trying to get Jesus to be scared, run and hide, and lose face in front of his followers. But as we will see, Jesus responded bravely, just like Nehemiah did.

So there *is* some political intrigue going on, all because those in power – both Herod of Roman power and the Pharisees of the religious powers – were threatened by the Kingdom of God, because God's kingdom intends to lower the prideful and those who abuse power and raise up those who are oppressed, the minorities and the immigrants and the poor:

“Though the Lord is great, he cares for the humble, but he keeps his distance from the proud.” (Psalm 138:6, nlt)

...and the Bible says this about Jesus:

“He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.” (Luke 1:52, niv)

So even though Jesus and the Kingdom of God was a threat, and those in power were threatening Jesus because of it, his response was not one of anger or retaliation; he spoke...

## 2. **Words to power from humble compassion.**

Jesus wasn't speaking from a place of superiority; in his humility he wouldn't relent or give up because he was filled with compassion for people – including the ones who were threatening him.

Jesus longs to gather the children of Jerusalem under his wings, even though they refuse to listen.

This is a posture of compassion. He longs to see them repent and return to the heart of God. This takes humility. He had all power according to Philippians 2, but he willingly gave it up because of his love for us; Jesus knows he is approaching his death, yet he still willfully walks toward the cross, out of compassion for even those who seek to do violence against him.

But Jesus continues to speak the truth to power, not because of vindictiveness, revenge, or hatred, or jealousy, but out of his love. The Proverb is true of Jesus:

“Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.”  
(Proverbs 27:6, nlt)

So Jesus repeatedly spoke truth – THE Truth – to power in order to get them to see the love God has for them in His Kingdom. But they rejected it, just like it's always been, like the prophet Jeremiah said:

“In fact, the Lord has tirelessly sent you all his servants, the prophets, but you wouldn't listen or pay attention.” (Jeremiah 25:4, ceb)

Jesus makes it clear that their rejection of the kingdom is not because it has not been offered to them; it had *continually* been offered to them. It is the will of Christ that they be restored, but *they* are the ones who refuse to listen. Yet Jesus remains compassionate and full of love. You can hear it in his tender plea to us:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30, niv)

Still, Jesus continues to speak...

## 3. **Truth through death.**

In other words, he doesn't stop loving them and speaking the truth of God's love to them, even though he knows fully well that it will ultimately lead to his own death.

Jesus walks toward Jerusalem with the knowledge of his death waiting, yet he continues to walk. He continues to heal. He continues to preach. He continues to help the people imagine a new kingdom where the last will be first and the poor fulfilled.

The Pharisees warned him to run because Herod was on the hunt for him, but Jesus said:

“Go tell that fox, ‘I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.’ In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!” (Luke 13:32-33, niv)

First, it’s worth pointing out what Jesus is saying when he called Herod, “that fox.” When I was in high school, to call someone a “fox” meant something much different than in Jesus’ day!

To the Jew, a fox symbolized three things: first, it was considered the *slyest* of animals. Second, it was regarded as the most *destructive* of animals. Third, it was the symbol of a worthless and insignificant man. So Jesus was implying that Herod is a cunning yet pathetic and powerless figure who thinks he can subvert the divine purpose of Jesus’ march toward Jerusalem. Jesus essentially calls Herod a varmint in the fields of the Lord. And at the same time, he’s delivering a message to the self-appointed messengers, the Pharisees: anyone who tries to change the course of God’s kingdom is no better than a rodent in the road: road-kill on the highway toward God’s purposes.

It takes a brave man to call the reigning king a fox!

But Jesus is willing to continue to pursue God’s Kingdom, no matter who attempts to stand in his way. In fact, he references his death when he talks about three days. Make no mistake: Jesus knew very clearly what was ahead of him – to be crucified. He also references his death when talking about how Jerusalem has killed the prophets before.

There is a certain kind of bravery that can walk toward death in confident hope, while preaching the very words that will get you killed, simply because they are the words God would have you speak.

We have seen this type of bravery at various moments in history; like I said earlier, the prophets of the Old Testament who preached, taught, and illustrated prophetic words despite knowing what the consequences could be.

Or, the Rev. Dr. King knew that preaching words of justice, equality, and nonviolent resistance could very well lead to his death, yet he continued to do so. And when Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke against the Nazi regime up until his death as a political prisoner. Or today, just look at what’s happening to believers in China, or Iran, or Egypt, or any country in the 10-40 window.

Jesus continued to bravely speak to those who rejected him, because it was out of his deep...

#### **4. Love in the face of rejection.**

There is intensity in God’s love for us that is often not matched in our desire for Him. God is more anxious to save us than we are to be saved...He had been to Jerusalem, but not many there accepted Him. To offer love and have it rejected brings great

pain, and that pain was now being expressed by Jesus<sup>2</sup> as he wept over Jerusalem, like a mother hen attempting to gather her chicks who reject her.

Jesus demonstrates the heart of the Father toward people as he loves them despite their rejection of him. God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah in the Old Testament in the same way:

“I thought to myself, how wonderful it would be to treat you like children and give you a beautiful land, an inheritance unrivaled among the nations. And I thought, you will call me father, and you won’t turn away from me. But as a woman betrays her lover, so you, people of Israel, have betrayed me, declares the Lord.” (Jeremiah 3:18-20, ceb)

In these passages, God shows himself to be a loving Father and a doting Mother, *which he is!* Yet despite that clear demonstration, in every way the people rejected God in Christ.

The imagery suggests that Jesus was willing to put himself in harm’s way to protect the people. In fact, Jesus himself said:

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:13, niv)

So great is his love that he weeps over Jerusalem and goes to his death – not just the Jews, but for *all* those living within her boundaries. Jesus weeps over *you*, too, and has gone into harm’s way to protect *you*, too. Do you love him in return? The more deeply he loves *them*, it seems the more violently *they* reject him. Yet Jesus determinedly walks toward his death. In fact, Luke told us earlier that, even though Jesus *knew* he was going to be tortured and put to death, he was *determined* to go there:

“As the time drew near for his return to heaven, he moved steadily onward toward Jerusalem with an iron will.” (Luke 9:51, tlb)

So great is his determination and love for us!

But he wasn’t just walking to his death; he knew what was beyond that in the purposes of God...

## 5. It’s not the *dying*, it’s the *rising*.

While Jesus continues to allude to his death, he’s *always* pointing toward his resurrection. Twice in those two verses of 32 and 33, Jesus references “three days.” The third day is the resurrection day.

Our hope today is *still* the resurrection.

I spent the last week with my parents in Salem, as many of you know we learned a week ago that my mom has a large, inoperable, glioblastoma tumor in her brain. Let

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<sup>2</sup> Ken Heer, *Luke: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007), 193–194.

me just say that this is not good news. We don't know how the cancer will respond to treatment. They think she'll qualify for clinical trials at OHSU, but who knows. The bottom line is, without God changing the natural order of things, unless something else takes her first, then the cancer will.

So, this has been very hard, as many of you have already experienced in your lives. And the volume of information they have to remember and keep track of with appointments, medications, and names is overwhelming. This is my notes from just one hour with the oncologist.

All that to say, this is frustrating, it's aggravating, and it's very hard to navigate, given the eventual outcome.

But here's what I know: Three years after I accepted Christ at 17 years old, I was baptized in a pool in McCall by my mentor, Dr. Laird. One year after that, Dr. Laird baptized my mom in the same place.

After I became a Christian, my parents accepted Christ and they belong to Salem First Church of the Nazarene.

So as hard as this is for us to deal with, I know that I know that I know there is a resurrection for my mom, and for us, because Jesus faced death in order to achieve the resurrection of the dead for those who believe.

When we look throughout history from the early Church, through the ages, to the modern-day saints and prophets, we see a theme that they do not fear death because they have an abiding hope in the resurrection.

Last week I tried to consider what I would do if I were in my mom's shoes, knowing that my time was limited. Then I quickly realized, *I AM in my mom's shoes; we all are!* All of us are on limited time in this life. We must be about Kingdom work in this short life, because the resurrection awaits us. ***But there are people who do not believe and will not experience resurrection life if we don't tell them in the short time we have!*** That is the confidence and certainty of this faith that we have.

You and I have this certain hope:

“The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see.” (Hebrews 11:1, tmt)

What is our hope in? Jesus said it very clearly:

“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26, niv)

So the question is – listen to me Christian: if you and I have this certain hope, then there is *nothing* more important for us to do than to...

## 6. ***Speak love courageously.***



Lent is a time for confessing and seeking out the Word of God for our lives, but God also wants us to courageously speak the truth in love, even if it means that those in power don't want to hear it; even if your own friends and family members reject you because of it.

I remember shortly after I became a Christian, my mom took me out to dinner to talk to me, sharing with me her concern that I was becoming a "fanatic" about Christ and that I was going to lose friends. I appreciated my mom's concern, and I admit that I was overly zealous at times. But I confidently told her that I honestly didn't care if I lost all my friends, as long as I had Jesus. Thankfully, my mom eventually accepted Jesus, too.

The church is called to preach the kingdom of God in the same ways that Jesus was, and the world often doesn't like it. But we are still called to *preach this word* – don't be intimidated. Say with the Apostle Paul:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16, niv)

And we need to follow the biblical instruction of Peter:

"Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ." (1 Peter 3:15-16, nlt)

The "Herods" and "Jeruselems" of our world might stand against us, but we are to preach the words anyway, even as we walk in the same direction of Jesus, toward the cross, out of love for others.

We are not so far removed from the prophets of old. The powers of today still seek control, power, and wealth; they still oppress the poor, the marginalized and minority, and the immigrant. The kingdom of God still calls for the last to be first, for justice, and for love. As citizens of this kingdom of God, we are called at times to speak prophetic words to the "Herods" and "Jeruselems" of our world.

Lent is a time set aside to reevaluate our hearts, to see the places where we have become the Herods, where we have sought power and control versus the kingdom of God in our world.

It is also a time for us to listen to the voice of God. As citizens of the kingdom of God, we are called to live like Christ, to care for the brokenhearted, to speak for the oppressed, to protect the widow and the orphan, to declare freedom to the captive and welcome the immigrant. This way of living is counter to the ways of this world and will lead us on the same path that Jesus walked—a path toward the cross.

Can we stand in the same humble courage – to live and show and share the love of God even in the face of death? Can we stand in hopeful expectation of the resurrection, as we tell others about the love of God in Christ?

*Pray*