

Luke 13: 31-35 Truth and Consequences

When I read this passage from Luke in preparing for today's service, at first it struck me as a text with two separate parts. It just seemed as if the two parts didn't fit together. It begins with a threat and ends with a lament. So of course that meant this passage was what I had to explore; to discover the link if there was one; to find the message in that linkage. One of the first oddities is found in the first verse. "At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." Now Pharisees are generally portrayed in the gospel accounts as leaders of the opposition to Jesus, as ones seeking to end this gathering of disciples. So when they come and give Jesus a warning, telling him to change his plans, what does this mean? Verse 22 of this chapter tells us that Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem. It seems the Pharisees are concerned and want Jesus to avoid the confrontation with Herod. The story of Nicodemus in John's gospel and the appearance of Joseph of Arimathea who was a member of the Sanhedrin indicate that not all who were Pharisees were in total opposition to Jesus. Some Pharisees are recorded as inviting Jesus into their homes. These inclusions tell us that the opposition was not the monolithic block we often envision, but the role of the Pharisees taken as a whole is that of opposition to what Jesus is saying and doing. Because of this many have seen this group as acting like double agents of Herod. The warning was meant to intimidate Jesus; thus preventing the gathering of an increasing following which would then arrive in Jerusalem to ferment conflict. From the text it is actually difficult to evaluate whether or not their warning is sincere or if it represents the delivering of a real threat. With this opening delivery of a threat however, Jesus quickly turns the focus to a statement about the nature of his mission. Jesus responds to the threat within the warning in no uncertain terms. His response seems to place these Pharisees as belonging to Herod's camp. At the very least he turns them into messengers to go back to Herod. He tells those who have warned him to deliver a message to Herod. Jesus' response makes clear the nature of his mission and his upcoming death as a part of that mission. Jesus announces he is doing the work of his mission and will continue it—casting out demons and performing cures. His work in that aspect will not be finished today or tomorrow but will continue until the third day. As he is

completing that work he will still be on his way to Jerusalem. The work he says he is completing is casting out demons, a part of his battle against evil and part of the establishment of the kingdom of God. The performing of cures is also a fundamental characteristic of Jesus' mission which is about establishing God's kingdom to redeem and create wholeness. It is clear the warning about Herod has no effect on his mission even though he acknowledges that death awaits him in Jerusalem. Verse 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. He openly indicates that his purpose is to go to Jerusalem to be killed. The death which is coming is also about the establishment of God's kingdom. This concept holds together Jesus' life and death. Jesus' actions during his public ministry have been to bring about deliverance—from hunger, from blindness or illness, from pain and suffering. It has been about healing and wholeness; it has been about demonstrating how God's kingdom looks here. The journey to Jerusalem and the cross is part of the process of establishing God's kingdom. The reference to the third day is also a reminder for us that the death on the cross is not the end of his work. Jesus' work of healing and deliverance does not end with the crucifixion—it will not be undone by death. Although Jesus is aware that he is traveling towards Jerusalem—a city with a hostile record toward prophets—the death that comes will itself be undone by the resurrection. After stating that he knows that Jerusalem, the historic seat of Jewish power where both kings and priest have their homes, is hostile to prophets. He knows Herod has had John the Baptist beheaded. Prophetic speaking to power is a dangerous activity that jeopardizes the lives of those who would speak the truth of God's kingdom to the powers that be. Jesus knows he is no exception. He speaks the truth of what God's kingdom requires and knows he will face the consequences. Truth and consequences. When I was much younger there was a television show which we watched as a family. It was called truth or consequences and was hosted by Ralph Edwards. The contestants were asked questions based on some little known fact which they had to answer before a buzzer sounded. Rarely, if ever was the contestant successful at coming up with the correct answers. Wrong answers resulted in the contestant having to perform an embarrassing stunt before the audience. The implication of this show and its title was that it was an either/or situation. If you gave the correct answer, there would be no consequences. In

the first part of our text today Jesus responds to the threat of death with the truth—he is on a mission to establish God’s kingdom. Herod’s consequence for Jesus’ truth is not really from Herod but is part of the work Jesus has begun; Truth and consequences. But Jesus will actually finish the mission beyond the cross with his resurrection. The next part of our text seems at first to be unrelated. Jesus knows his going to Jerusalem will bring death. He knows that the powerful there are hostile to him. Yet after stating clearly that Jerusalem is the place which kills the prophets and stones those sent to it, he express his longing that Jerusalem could be different. “How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! Jesus’ response to his rejection by Jerusalem and its citizens is not anger but grief. Here is the link between the two parts of this passage: Jesus’ desire to gather his people. The image of a mother hen spreading her wings as a protective cover over her brood of chicks. The desire of Jesus to gather and the unwillingness of people to come to him are placed side by side here. The journey to the cross is part of that desire to gather the people of God back into the relationship of love. In this passage which is known as Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem we have the juxtaposition of truth and consequences. Jesus expresses his love for humanity, the children of Jerusalem, against the reality that his message—the truth that he has spoken profoundly discomforts the very humanity he loves. The discomforting fact for us today is that we are Jerusalem; at least we often act like Jerusalem. When we hear the words of Jesus in the context of our lives, speaking the whole truth to us, it may bring comfort—but often it still bears considerable discomfort. We would rather the message of Jesus bring only comfort, but the word he brings resists conforming to our desires. We want to shrink Jesus down to our personal size and commitment. Jesus did not belong to the establishment or to the revolutionary party—he refused to be their king. For those who supported law and order—he was a rebel, dangerous to the system. For those who were active revolutionaries, he was a nonviolent lover of peace. He offended the passive, world-forsaking ascetics by his worldliness. And for the devout who adapted to the world, he was too uncompromising. For the silent majority, he was too noisy and for the noisy, he was too quite, too gentle for the strict and too strict for the gentle. In other words he was attacked on all sides. Today, time and again if we listen to what Jesus taught, it counters our status-

conscious, competitive and consumerist culture's values. We like to hear, "Watch out for number one." Jesus says, "You're not number one." The world promotes, "Tit for Tat." Jesus says, "Do good to those who hate you." We would like to hear, "Watch out for your own." Jesus proposes, "If anyone needs it, give him your coat." We'd like to believe, "Charity begins at home." Jesus tells us, "Give him your shirt, too." The world tells us not to be a fool. Jesus tells us Blessed are the merciful. We want to hear, "Strive to be first." Jesus has told us, "The first shall be last." None of these truths that Jesus told us about the way of God's kingdom are likely to make us comfortable when we look at our lives. Throughout Lent as we contemplate the cross, we are called to consider whether our lives lead appropriately to that cross. Does the way we live and make sense of the journey Jesus made lead to our participation in the establishment of God's kingdom? Do we understand that although grace is abundant and free to us, there was a cost? Do we take seriously the commitment to be followers who are sent into the world God so loves to demonstrate that love in word and deed? Do we see the truth of our own way of living? That is the link between the threat and the lament. Jesus' work to establish God's kingdom requires the truth be told about how short we fall in being citizens of God's kingdom, but in the lament we also see how great God's desire is to gather us despite it all. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.