

Third Sunday in Lent 28 Feb 2016

Isaiah 55:1-9

Psalm 63: 1-9

1 Corinthians 10: 1-13

Luke 13:31-35

[Lent 3C February 28, 2016](#) Textweek

We all heard it; didn't we? In today's gospel Jesus uses the "F-word"; "*Go and tell that fox for me*". And if it wasn't for that emotive outburst we might well have overlooked what is a seemingly uninspiring gospel reading.

Careful and considered use of the "F-word" however can be a useful device for both getting our attention and at the same time awakening our emotional response. And a closer look at the gospel identifies where Jesus is coming from; and for us, that might resonate with some of our wilderness wrestling as we too seek to discover our Christ-likeness.

The "F-word" response from Jesus is given context in the first line of the gospel reading: "*At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."*" And this same line gives a context for our Lenten wrestling.

The Pharisees, the Church, offer Jesus an escape, an orientation toward safety; "*Get away from here*". It is a temptation for him, and for us, that is as great, if not greater than the temptations of the 'devil' in the narrative of 40 days in the wilderness.

And at the same time, the ruling culture and civil order, represented by the ruling figure of Herod, wants to kill him; "*Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.*"

In that first line of the gospel we have a context for much of our wrestling in the wilderness (of Lent); for we are tempted into the comfort of weekly Church attendance as an escape from the many demons that are yet to be cast out and the many dis-eases that need to be healed.

And as if to add a further degree of difficulty to the whole process of Lent; we are also reminded of cultural and socio-political forces that 'want to kill us'; greed, scarcity, fear of others and a fear of all that touches the borders of our ego.

How does Jesus respond to these religious temptations and worldly forces; and what can we learn from him as he faces the very same temptations and forces that we face?

In 'setting his face toward Jerusalem he goes to the core, the source, of all that offers both security and death; and for us there is the realisation that both are located in the one and same place; "*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!*"

Now, because we already know the outcome of all that is to follow, we know that Jerusalem is also the place where resurrection is to found.

This is such a clever and complex piece of gospel narrative for it calls into question, and calls us to question, the Church, religious leaders, the ruler of society and the governing laws; and in 'Jerusalem' we call into question the source, foundation and icon of the whole sacred tradition.

It is also an affirming gospel when we appreciate that Jesus was such a threat to Herod; he stood for something very different to the order of the day and that challenged even the most powerful.

In today's gospel, the church is given its true place as a body that confronts all that brings death to humanity; and with Jerusalem as the nominated GPS reference it implies a new way forward that requires confronting both our cultural definitions and our faith or religious traditions.

Going back to the initial question: "*How does Jesus respond to these religious temptations and worldly forces; and what can we learn from him as he faces the very same temptations and forces that we face?*" we might look at the teaching Jesus was familiar with, the words of Isaiah.

Jesus came out of the wilderness changed, and with a new understanding of his faith tradition; he discovered the place within from which he could live out the prophetic reality that Isaiah speaks of.

The Jesus in today's gospel has a worldview of abundance and not greed: he lives in answer to Isaiah's question: "*Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?*"

It is a worldview of inclusion; "*you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you*"; and a worldview that holds a divine orientation rather than an ego-centric view; "*my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*"

During Lent we have an opportunity to confront the reality of our orientation, and an opportunity to discover an embarrassing reality; to see that when we hear the words "*Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.*""; we run for cover.

And where in the world have we run to?

We are, and this is most of the Anglican church in Australia, members of the wealthiest 1% of people on the planet and we hold more wealth than half the world's population, we have more possessions than all who have lived before us, and we have bigger homes and more emptiness than any previous community, we have more obesity, and more suicides, more depression and more reliance on prescription medicine than anyone could have imagined even 100 years ago..

Herod want's to kill us, and we've run away from that confrontation into death itself. And yet, we have the same choice, the same potential and the same possibilities that Jesus wrestled with when confronting the temptations and forces around him.

The end of the gospel today is addressed to us all and to us as the Church; *How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 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.'*"

The divine desire is one of gathering into 'the body of Christ'; and our response, so often; *we were not willing!*

Verse 35 is again an amazingly simple piece of writing; *See, your house is left to you.* This could be an echo of Isaiah 5:9 "*The LORD Almighty has declared in my hearing: 'Surely the great houses will become desolate, the fine mansions left without occupants.'*"

However, bearing in mind the emotive language of the earlier "F-word", this short utterance might be saying much more; the temple in Jerusalem is no longer my house but yours; your religious practices are of your own making and no longer reflect the in-dwelling of God.

And the phrase can also be interpreted as 'now it is all yours, it is up to you', for Jesus goes on to say; "*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.'*"

We all have a lot to wrestle with; and for those who watch the news, perhaps during Lent we might picture Herod in the caricature of Donald Trump; appreciating how easy it

is to have our minds tempted into ways and thoughts that are lower and lower by the day

And at the same time hear the prophetic promise of Isaiah:

"Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."