

Courage and God's Timing
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Luke 13:31-35

Five years ago this week, the world as we knew it changed for ever, when the World Health Organization officially declared the spread of a novel coronavirus had reached the level of a global pandemic. It was a strange and scary time. I don't think a full-blown pandemic like we read about in history books was something any of us had on our collective radars at the time. In hindsight, it's not clear there was much we could have done to prepare for the aftermath of the uneven response to it, either. In this community, that response began with bishop's directive to cancel all in-person worship services until further notice. That email arrived in my inbox on a Saturday morning, just hours before a scheduled wedding. We were able to proceed, as the number of guests was below what the restrictions for public gatherings were at the time (and which restrictions would be changed to "stay home, stay safe!" in just a matter of hours afterward). After the wedding, I remember distinctly Jim and Julie and I saying that we'd see each other soon... where "soon" ended up being a matter of months rather than the couple of weeks we'd initially thought it would be. During that shutdown, I lost track of how many times we collectively joined in Jesus' lament for this version of Jerusalem – not because it kills prophets, but because it's our home, and as much as we wanted to be together in it, and it felt like it wanted us to be here, we knew it was dangerous to do so.

We meet Jesus in a similar place this morning. He's on the road to Jerusalem when some Pharisees come to warn him that King Herod wants to him. His response is a combination of, "So what?" and "I wish that place, and that community, both of which I

love dearly, didn't have to be that way." It's kind of a weird moment in that it overlaps different timeframes, and contains both a lament and references to Jerusalem as both a place where prophets are not welcome and where Jesus longs to gather the community under his protection. No matter his feelings about it, Jesus will go to Jerusalem to face Herod's music only in God's good time, and not a moment sooner. "Jesus... [compares] the necessity of attending to Herod's threat to kill as opposed to what God deems necessary for Jesus to do. The fact that Jesus views it more urgent to go to Jerusalem because of God's will than to heed warnings about Herod, seems to indicate the ultimate concern is theological."¹

The most pressing of those concerns is the timing of it all. As in, Jesus isn't done with his preaching, teaching, and healing on the road yet. It's a lesson for these Pharisees, and anyone else who's listening, that God's time, and ours, are not the same. Jesus knows that with every fiber of his being. Those two timeframes haven't merged for him yet, which is why he says he is "casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work" (Luke 13:33, NRSV). In the face of the implied threat from Herod, Jesus demonstrates real courage, the sort which emerges in the face of a "significant, daunting, or even frightening challenge and not turning away from it but rather meeting it head-on. It is this... kind of courage that Jesus displays... We don't know who these particular Pharisees are or what motivates them, and it doesn't really matter. We just know that they tell Jesus to run and save his

¹ David Schnasa Jabobsen, "Commentary on Luke 13:31-35." <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/reviced-common-lectionary/second-Sunday-in-lent-3/commentary-on-luke-1331-35-4> [accessed March 10, 2025].

life... and that Jesus refuses."² He says only that he will stay on the road toward Jerusalem, as he is already doing. He knows full well what the consequences will be for him. It is this commitment to his fate, and ultimately to both God and the people he came to serve, which shows us exactly what it takes to do the sometimes difficult work God gives us to do.³

It takes courage for Jesus to stay on the road – that is, working on God's timeline – in the face of a community which doesn't always return his love for them in kind. This is what sets Jesus apart in his refusal to listen to the warning these Pharisees deliver. When anyone else would have taken the threat seriously enough to change course and lay low for a bit, he doesn't. He can't, because his love for the world is such that it will stop at nothing, not even going up to Jerusalem to suffer the same fate as other prophets, to protect it. It leads me to wonder if Jesus' actions are more than just "courageous." As we walk down the road with him toward the confrontation of Good Friday, we will see him, "embracing who he was called to be for the sake of those he loved, and thereby inviting us to be who we are called to be for the sake of those around us." I also have to wonder, as the Lutheran pastor and scholar David Lose poses the question, "What would our community look like if we decided together to live wholeheartedly, making room to name our vulnerabilities in a cross-shaped confidence that God is with us and has given us sufficient resources – including each other! – to not

² David Lose, "Lent 2C: Courage and Vulnerability." <https://www.davidlose.net/2016/02/lent-2-c-courage-and-vulnerability/> [accessed March 10, 2025].

³ Ibid.

simply endure the challenges before us but to flourish as we discover that God meets us most reliably precisely in our places of vulnerability?"⁴

If there was anything we learned from the long season of the pandemic shutdown and its aftermath, I think that was it: that if we work together, we can meet the challenges that make us vulnerable to ridicule or physical harm head on, and in God's good time. That doesn't mean we don't have to come to terms with how those things have changed us as we move through them. Five years on, we still grieve what we have lost in terms of human lives, time with our loved ones, and the sense of being in this together as words like "mask" and "vaccine" became curse words. We ignore these memories, and the feelings associated with them, at our own peril. They are a part of who we are, and, like it or not, will come back to bite us when we don't expect them to. Facing them still takes courage. But, when we look back, we will see that God never failed to gather us in and give us shelter like a mother hen gathers chicks under her wings – and will still do so if we ask. There's where our sense of hope still lies. To paraphrase the hymn "God of Grace and God of Glory," may it save us from weak resignation to the evils we deplore, and grant us the wisdom and courage for the living of these days.⁵

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Harry Emerson Fosdick, "God of Grace and God of Glory." CWM RHONDDA. *The Hymnal 1982* (New York: Church Publishing, 1985), 594.