



March 17, 2019 Standing Firm On The Way

Given by Rev. Mattei

[Lk 13:31-35](#)

Taking care of the infrastructure (fixing and maintaining roads, bridges, ports, tunnels and all other ways of communication) is a sign of good administration and progress: peoples' livelihood and safety depend on it.

Luke expands on Jesus as the Way to the Father from the first pages of his gospel ([Lk 1:76-80](#)) to the last pages of his Acts of Apostles ([Acts 18:24-26](#); [22:3-5](#); [24:10-15](#)). Jesus is the Way into which his disciples get instructed and walk ([Lk 3:4-5](#); [7:26-27](#); [10:3](#)). People may have even spent time together and shared food fellowship with Jesus, but if they have not remained on the Way, Jesus does not know where they come from and does not acknowledge them as his own ([Lk 13:22-27](#)). This is what Jesus had just been talking about when the sympathizers of Herod arrived and wanted to scare him away. But Jesus is firm on his way to heal and restore people to wholeness ([Lk 13:32-33](#)) remaining faithful to his prophetic vocation (Lk 4:16-21). He does not let the threat of violence by clever little fox deter him: God has other plans for his prophets even as the world (Jerusalem) crucifies them!

Herod, who claims Jewish ethnicity, is a puppet governor of Rome. Roman occupation of Israel began nearly seventy years before Jesus' ministry, so few of his listeners would remember a time without an occupying army, religious zealots, and political factions constantly struggling for control. In the midst of this struggle for power, Jesus dared to suggest a different, non-violent way, and displayed divine favor by healing and forgiving. So, of course, Herod would want to kill Jesus, who captured the hearts and minds of people Herod meant to control. Scripture tells us that Jesus is eventually overcome by this conflict. History tells us that the temple is eventually torn down by Rome as a punishment for continued revolts against the Empire.

When we hear Jesus retort, “Tell that fox. . . .,” we have to keep in mind a litany of intersections between Jesus, his followers, and the powerful members of the Herodian dynasty. Luke synchronizes his Gospel with the Herodian dynasty. The days when Elizabeth and Zechariah learn of the birth of John are marked by King Herod’s rule ([Lk 1:5](#)). So also the beginning of Jesus’ preaching and healing begins under the shadow of another Herod’s rule ([3:1](#)). Herod imprisons John ([3:19-20](#)) and executes him ([9:7-9](#)); at both points, Herod also grows concerned about how Jesus’ ministry might challenge his own corrupt rule. During Jesus’ interrogation at his arrest, Herod is curious about Jesus’ power ([23:8-11](#)). In [Acts 12](#), yet another Herod engages in the persecution of the disciples. In Luke’s telling, Jesus’ miracles are not just signs of his power but embodiments of the good news. Those cured of demons and sickness alike are restored to their neighbors and their communities. Though we do not hear what concerned Herod about Jesus’ ministry, we catch a clue in Jesus’ response. It is the abundance of life that Jesus brings in his wake that most threatens Herod, the fox.

Jesus’ response to the Pharisees makes it evident that he considers the warning a taunt of people who were enjoying what was about to happen: Jesus’ head-on collision with the political power. “Fox” was a rabbinic term of derision for someone known to be habitually deceptive, a creature of low cunning. What Jesus is saying, essentially, is that his ministry is coming to a close and that he will follow the same fate of the ancient prophets and come to the end of his earthly life in Jerusalem, the city that has so grossly misunderstood and opposed the prophets who had spoken on God’s behalf. Jesus’ lament is pregnant with parental sorrow: the city will be left to its own devices and will not see him until messengers of God are received with gracious blessing and hospitality. Those hearing Jesus’ words were immediately reminded of the “Great Hallel” (Psalms 113 through 118) sung on every feast in every family: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We have blessed you from the house of the Lord.” The messianic meaning of Jesus’ words did not need explanation: he had come in the name of the Lord and Jerusalem had not blessed him. They’ll be able to see and claim him when they are able to mean what they say in their prayer and blessing: some ancient texts report v. 35 (“you will not see me until *the time comes when* you say, ‘Blessed is

the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”) without the addition “the time comes when”. In other words, v. 35 would read “you will not see me until you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’” The blessing that God promises to Abram ([Gen 15:5-6](#)) is fulfilled in Abrams’ new children who in their turn are empowered to acknowledge and bless the Lord. Jesus loves all the people even those who threaten him and is expectant of the time when they will turn around and enjoy God’s blessing. His hope is undeterred.

But the Lord that Abram’s children will be able to see is like a resolute and fierce hen who wishes to protect her brood (from the fox?). The image of the protective hen, as inconsequential as it may seem, reminds us of the scandal of a vulnerable crucified Messiah, who proposes the way of the cross as the way to salvation: love to the end through a life of non-recrimination and non-violent means. In the midst of conflict, Jesus refuses to stop loving, healing and rebuilding people’s lives, even amidst the woe. Jesus refuses to run away, even amidst the knowledge that his life is on the line.

Lent is a journey that recalls Jesus’s walk toward his own personal destruction, humiliation, and ultimately his death. Yet, Lent is also a preparation for life after the woe. It’s a time to reconsider Jesus’ Way. Rather than focusing on the woes and threats of evil, we enter the disciplines of Lent and trust Jesus’ resurrection. We stand firm by the cross ([Philippians 3:17-4:1](#)) and build an ability to say “blessed is the one who comes in the Lord’s name.” We bear with the sorrow of death and prepare for the abundance of God’s divine life.

Let us follow him, undeterred, unapologetically, faithfully, trustfully. Amen.