



“Come Meet Jesus...Who Challenges Power”

Second Sunday in Lent
Saturday & Sunday, March 16 – 17, 2019

All Services

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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Luke 13:31-35

On Friday morning, I had already written my sermon for this weekend. In fact, I'd already given that sermon Thursday night. It wasn't the best sermon I'd ever given, but it wasn't the worst. I still wanted to tinker with it a bit, draw some things out, maybe move a few things around. But as I sat waiting for the light to cross 32nd Street, everything changed. The news coming out of New Zealand caused me to shudder. As of Sunday morning, fifty people were killed and just as many injured while they were praying at their mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. Fear washed over me, and I started to sob.

As I reflected on our story for today on Friday afternoon – and let's be real – Saturday morning, I started to see a theme running through it. Fear. Fear was the theme flowing throughout this story: Herod's fear of Jesus and Jesus' lack of fear. Fear is a powerful force. It can be distracting. It can be all-consuming. It comes out of us in many ways, manifesting in completely different emotions. Fear can have incredible power over us.

We all have fears, right? Some that are real and keep you up at night. Some that are silly, and your friends make fun of you for them... in fact, I'm too afraid to share that one with you. You all might tease me for it later.

We all have fears: arachnophobia – fear of spiders, glossophobia – fear of public speaking, kinemortophobia – fear of zombies, acrophobia – fear of heights, claustrophobia – fear of tight or small spaces.

Xenophobia – fear of the unfamiliar, the unknown, fear of strangers. Herod was afraid of what he didn't know. He was afraid of what he didn't understand. He was afraid of Jesus.

Think about what Jesus was doing and saying. He was healing people of their diseases – for some people diseases they had for their whole lives. He was raising people from the dead. He was eating with sinners, welcoming outcasts and strangers to his table. And he was proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom of God - a magnificent kingdom ruled by a God with the power to restore life and wholeness, a God with the power to bring about liberation and freedom.

What Jesus was doing and saying was unheard of, unfamiliar, unknown – and sometimes, just downright amazing and surprising. That probably scared Herod. In chapter 9 of Luke's Gospel, we are told that Herod is perplexed by Jesus. He had no

solution. He was in doubt. He was at a loss. When we are at a loss, when we have no solution, when we are in doubt, that can cause us to fear. Herod was afraid of what Jesus was doing and saying because he didn't understand what Jesus was about, and he was afraid of losing his power.

So, Herod wants to kill Jesus. He wants to eliminate what was threatening his power and who was causing him fear.

And this is what happened in Christchurch in New Zealand on Friday: acts of violence caused by fear. This was fear of the unknown, fear of the unfamiliar, fear of the stranger. This was xenophobia – fear of those who practice another religion, fear of those from another country, fear of those with a different color of skin.

This was fear that had power. Fear has power because it can grow and change shape. This fear became hate and that hate became violence. But, ultimately, people were murdered because of fear while they did something so sacred. They were killed while they were praying.

Fear has power because it can spread quickly. Fear begets fear. The fear I felt on Friday morning in my car was all-consuming because the faces of people I love flashed in front of my eyes. I take seriously acts of terrorism because the people murdered in those mosques could easily be my people; they could easily be people I love and call my family. And now, next Friday, Muslims around the world will wonder if they should go to the mosque to pray. Are they safe? Some are now afraid to go to a place that should be safe, that should be sacred.

Jesus shows us how to respond. He shows us how to challenge the power of fear. Jesus always responds with love. As we heard in our story, even in the face of rejection, Jesus shows love. He wants to be like a mother hen gathering her chicks, protecting them; that is love. Jesus always seeks relationships with others; he welcomes the stranger.

These Jesus characteristics were exemplified on Friday at al-Noor mosque in Christchurch. Daoud Nabi, 71, welcomed a stranger as he stood at the mosque doors. His last words were "Come in, brother." That brother was the shooter. And like a hen protecting her chicks, Nabi died shielding – protecting – someone else from the bullets.

Yes, fear is a powerful force in our world, but we can't allow fear to have the power. Jesus challenged fear, and he calls us to challenge fear's power as well. It's the only way xenophobia and hate will become relationship and love.

In this season of Lent, we journey with Jesus; we are called to imitate Jesus and follow in his footsteps. Jesus always responds with love; we must respond with love. Jesus always seeks to be in relationship with others, especially the stranger and the outcast. We too must seek relationships. We must seek to understand the unfamiliar and know the unknown. Jesus' journey is one of love and relationship; let's take that path with him.

Amen.

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