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“The Bully and You” **Sermon on Luke 13:31-35**

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Following the bright and light transfiguration of Jesus on the mountaintop, Luke tells us that Jesus “set his face to Jerusalem.” It is the season of Lent, and we are on a journey to the cross.

Luke 13:31-35

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” ³² He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. 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.’ ³⁴ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! 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.’”

“Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” There is in this world, the “bully.” I don’t know if you’ve had a bully in your life, or maybe you were the bully, but even so, I suspect bullies have their bullies.

I have told you about my first bully, David Lane. David was years older than I, and it seemed that my paper route would always deliver to David’s doorstep. David would take my arm and run my fist into the nearest wall. He had size and strength all in

his favor. I had no options, save one. I remembered at the time something I overheard in church, and that was to pray for your enemy. So, I prayed that David Lane would be hit by a truck.

That is what the bully does to the soul. Around the same time, I encountered another bully in shop class; his name was Jim. I don't remember his last name, probably because he doesn't occupy space or time in my life. One day, Jim slugged me in the arm. The next day he did it again. But he did not do it a third time. He tried, but in a flash, he was down with his arm behind his back eating sawdust off the shop class floor. Jim had neither age, size, nor weight on me. Nor did he know that my older brother trained me for combat, much to my own expense, but I was trained.

Now, I'm not proud of what I did to Jim that day. Okay, maybe I'm a little proud. I was more surprised by the rage that just took over me, just like that, and made me someone other than who I am.

I am feeling the same rage with that fool who has hoodwinked a country with fake news, and sends jets, tanks, and rockets into hospitals, homes, and humans, and lies about it. I have nothing but rage for any who believe that fool and defends him. There are eight billion people on this planet and one blooming bully who holds the world hostage.

"Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." Bullies have been around a long time. The one the Pharisees was warning Jesus about was Herod of Antipas. He was the one who had that lovely dinner party with braised lamb, tomatoes, a classic Bordeaux and, on the side, John the Baptist's head on a platter. Mad man in a mad, mad world. "He's out to kill you," said some Pharisees. "Get away from here," said some Pharisees. It's as if they cared about Jesus.

Some Pharisees. I've tended to lump Pharisees all together. Those mustache-twisting bad guys who are out to destroy Jesus. Lump them all together. But, Luke says, don't do that. Don't do that to tax-collectors, don't do that to Samaritans, don't do that to Pharisees. Don't do that.

Luke has Pharisees inviting Jesus to dinner in their homes. In the Book of Acts, Luke says some of the early Christians were Pharisees. In the Book of Acts, we remember the one whose name was Saul, who became the Apostle Paul. Not every Pharisee, not every Samaritan, not every Russian.

I've heard reports of Russian prisoners saying that they had no clue they were going to fight in Ukraine. I've heard reports of Russians who refused to fight because they're related to a Ukrainian or have a friend who is a Ukrainian. That bully has them going to war to kill Nazis. You see, you just name your enemy "Hitler," and it is open season all year. I have read where Russian soldiers, who realized the truth, just laid down their weapons and refused to fight. The strongest one in the world is the one who keeps their head, while all about them, others are losing theirs.

So, it is here, we are against the Russians. But who is to know what is going on in the hearts and minds of boys stuck in a convoy of tanks? Long rows of menacing tanks, and inside one of them might be a boy who just wants to play soccer, a kid who might make you smile. A boy who just wants to go fishing with his dad. After all, what does the song say? "The Russians love their children, too."

There's some love in the statement, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." And to the threat of the bully, Jesus doesn't run! In fact, Jesus shares his itinerary. "Go tell that fox that I'm going to do what I'm going to do. I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. I must be on my way. It's impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem." Those are words to admire. There is no fear of the bully.

What did President Zelensky say? "I need ammunition, not a ride." Those are words of someone who knows that there are things worse than dying, and that is, to walk around this earth with an amputated soul. To live as fraud. To be the President with no people and no country. To be a savior who runs.

Can you imagine being someone you're not? Maybe that's not difficult to imagine. We don't always live to who we are. I know an accountant who wanted to be a musician, but he was worried about making a living, so he became an accountant. Talented guy. I know a doctor who wanted to be an architect. Fortunately, he made enough money to design his own homes. I know a preacher who retired, and now he's the happiest guy in the world because he's free to say whatever he wants to say. Doesn't have to measure every word. I can't wait.

I know a family or two or twenty who have serious problems, but they hide it behind the wall and gate. You need a code to get in. It's tiring work - keeping up appearances.

Imagine having to be someone you're not. Sometimes you make the choice, sometime the choice is made for you.

It wasn't too long ago, well, actually it still exists, and it seems like it's getting traction and making a comeback - do you know that if you are born with a sexual orientation that is outside of what some call "normal", you have to keep "who you are" to yourself? Bullies can sniff it out, with the result being so many suicides of kids, sons, and daughters. No, you don't tell a soul. People can be mean and violent. Even the church has their share of bullies in the pulpit who can damn you to hell. Can you imagine trying to paint the story of your life and not being allowed to paint with your true colors?

We have a history of bullying one another. Black people over here. Don't drink from this fountain. The construction industry and meatpacking plants are the most welcoming places on the planet. No citizenship required; just do the job. Management

seems to have no problems disobeying the law of the land. So, why doesn't ICE go after management? Cut the head off. No, we go after the little powerless ones.

We have a history of bullying one another.

The early church strived to look like Jesus - welcoming all those who had no power to the love and grace of Jesus Christ. And I think in this text, Jesus is telling the early church to not be afraid. "Go tell the people who are bullying you. Go tell the people who are throwing you in prison. Go tell the people who will stick you in front of the lions in the coliseum. Go tell those bullies just who you are.

Be not afraid to call out the bully who is a fool, for they are popping up all over this world, making people drink the Kool-Aid of craziness. Tossing out fact and applying fiction. Don't choose the winning side of the history of nations. Nations come and go. As Sophie read to us from Paul, our citizenship is in heaven." We have different rules to follow.

We are eternal people who believe that all things are being reconciled by the blood of the cross. So say to that fox, "Do you want to catch us? Then follow us. Here! We'll give you the itinerary."

"For tomorrow, we'll be helping fund a DACA student with her college education because she wants to be a doctor and doesn't want to live a lie. Tomorrow we'll be tutoring in the schools because that is our baptismal vow. Tomorrow we'll think less of ourselves and more of the others because that is where the holy lies."

And the next day, you will find us praying for our enemy. For you, Mr. Putin. "Dear Lord, we pray for Vladimir, the most frightened, unhappy, angry man on the planet. For Hell is the absence of God. We pray, O God, that he humbles himself before you, the one who lost his life to the bullies of this world only to give his life for the bullies of this world. Amazing grace. Amen."

And on the third day, he'll know where to find us.