

# Second Sunday in Lent

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## Introduction

Today's short Gospel reading marks the mid-way point in the portion of the Lucan narrative (9:51 – 19:27) which details Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. The passage involves two very different pericopes and juxtaposes puzzling, purposeful and poignant elements, all of which seem currently very potent and any of which can provide a jumping off point for further reflection on conflict.

**Preparation:** How do you understand the following terms: propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation? Can you identify some contemporary examples – perhaps relating to the same issue. Are they all equally bad/dangerous?

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## Text

### 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.”

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.

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.’

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!

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.’”

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## Comment

There are two very different pericopes in today's Gospel reading – the first of which is unique to Luke. These are tied together not just by their references to Jerusalem but also by explicit and implicit subtexts about motivation and purpose and their consequences.

We are immediately confronted with one of these in v.31 which raises a question about what lies behind the Pharisees' message to Jesus: is this a friendly warning prompted by concern for his wellbeing or an attempt to disrupt his activities for some reason? It is certainly possible that this is a genuine warning – after all Herod, despite his professed wish to see Jesus (9:9; 23:8), has had his cousin John the Baptist beheaded. On the other hand his treatment of Jesus when he does eventually encounter him (23:11–12) is less decisive and more ambiguous: he both questions and ridicules him; and while he is presented with an opening to effect a judicial execution (in contrast to his disposal of John), ultimately he refuses the opportunity.

There is also no way of answering this question from the information that Luke gives us here since, in contrast to other places in his narrative (e.g. 6:7; 11:53–4), he provides no pointers to the Pharisees' motives. Neither can we draw a confident inference based on how he treats the Pharisees elsewhere since this is 'puzzling, inconsistent and complex'. [1] In some places they are presented as clearly hostile or trying to trap Jesus (e.g. 5: 30; 6:7), but on other occasions (7:36; 14:1) their offering of table hospitality implies a more positive attitude (although these episodes do not necessarily have good outcomes); and in Acts (15:5) the conversion of some Pharisees to Christianity, which could easily have been ignored, is explicitly noted. In the end then we are left with a conundrum – are we to read the message of the Pharisees as an act of concern, or as a piece of manipulation aimed at derailing the mission of Jesus? Is it information, misinformation or disinformation we are dealing with here and how do we make that judgement?

No such ambiguity shrouds the response they receive however: regardless of whether this is a friendly warning about a genuine threat or a piece of calculated trouble-making, Jesus refuses to be turned from the cause he is committed to and the course he intends to pursue to bring it about. Instead he reiterates in no uncertain terms that he is about the work of God's Kingdom – we know from Jesus' words in various places (e.g. 4:19–19; 11:20) that healings and exorcisms are unequivocal signs of this and Luke's account of the journey to Jerusalem is replete with accounts of them. Moreover Jesus' response covers two distinct dimensions – he will not be scared off by a threat of present danger from what he is doing *here and now* in Galilee, and he will not be deterred by the threat of *future danger* from continuing on to Jerusalem to do what he intends to do there. Prophets have been threatened with death, and indeed have died, in Jerusalem before (Jeremiah 26: 7–11, 20–23; Lk 11:47–50; Mt 23: 29–30) and Jesus knows that this is likely to be his fate too if he goes there (9: 21–3). Nevertheless this is what he has 'set his face' to do (9:51) and he intends to see it through.

Luke's hearers would have recognised in this echoes of similar prophetic confrontations with power from Israel's history: Samuel rejecting Saul (1 Sam 15); Nathan rebuking David (2 Sam 12); Elijah bearding Ahab (1 Kings 21), and of course John the Baptist confronting Herod over his marriage to Herodias (Mk 6:18). Stories from classical literature about charismatic philosophers encountering but refusing to be cowed by established (and often tyrannical) authority figures might also have been familiar to some of Luke's readers. We too might feel there are some very contemporary resonances here for us as well. Prophetic ministry undertaken in the face of power is fraught with danger but Jesus has a clear sense of his calling and a commitment to it which allows him to remain undaunted and resolute in the face of the both present and future threat.

For Jesus there is also a deep poignancy inextricably entangled with this resolve. The word *thel* – desire – occurs twice in v.34 – once with respect to Jesus and once with respect to Jerusalem. Although verses 33 and 34 read like ‘a threat of eventual judgement uttered by a prophet as he nears the city whose history has been to kill the prophets’<sup>[2]</sup> Jesus’ intent is not the city’s destruction. His desire, his deep longing, for Jerusalem – expressed in tender terms of shelter and nurture – is very different. At the same time, he recognises a diametrical recoil which will both bring grief to those in the city and delay a fuller recognition and reception of God’s work within it. Jesus knows that the course he must pursue will precipitate consequences not only for himself but also for others. The first he can and does accept, the second he cannot prevent, despite his deepest longing for the well-being of Jerusalem.

[1] Amy-Jill Levine, *The Annotated Jewish New Testament* (Oxford: OUP, 2011) p.110.

[2] Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2002) p168

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## Response

This passage raises some potentially difficult issues in a number of areas which are relevant to situations of conflict, and some pointers for reflection on these are suggested below. You might find it helpful to consider these questions with respect to a specific conflict situation which affects you, or in conversation with others.

Information, misinformation and disinformation can all play a major role in conflict situations – both local and global – and we live in an age where any of these can be quickly spread and massively amplified. Moreover we have access to a seemingly endless array of sources ‘around the clock’.

- In such a supersaturated atmosphere, how can we be more discriminating in our consumption of ‘information’ and properly critical towards different sources from which it comes’?
- What can we do when we are uncertain of the motivation/purpose behind information we are given?
- Given the speed with which unhelpful information spreads and escalation occurs, are there ways in which we can guard against falling victim to, or perpetuating mis- or disinformation?

Sometimes conflict situations will bring us into difficult or even potentially dangerous situations

- What sort of things can help keep us steady as we navigate difficult situations?
- How can we weigh up different levels of risk and judge whether or not to press ahead with a course of action?

In a conflict situation, is it ever justifiable to embark on a course of action which has consequences for others beyond ourselves? How should we approach evaluating such a situation?

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## Prayer

Jesus,  
in the face of confusion  
may we be discerning  
in our judgement,

in the face of danger  
may we be steady  
in our purpose,

in the face of conflict  
may we be compassionate  
in our responses

just as you were.

Amen