

**The Second Sunday in Lent  
Holy Comforter Church  
The Rev. John E. Shields  
February 28, 2010**

**“Go and tell that fox for me...”**

**Well you can't say that Jesus was always meek and mild, can you?**

**“Go and tell that fox...”**

**There is just no way that you can make something nice and polite out of this.**

**A fox is sneaky, sly and crafty.**

**Herod is a powerful man, and Jesus is saying insulting things about him.**

**This is an interesting and difficult passage of scripture.**

**First, it sort of throws us for a loop because the Pharisees – those folks that Jesus is always – it seems – having arguments with – they are generally pictured in the gospels as ‘bad guys.’ Now, these folks normally viewed as enemies, now they seem to be trying to help Jesus out.**

**They are telling Jesus that Herod is out to kill him.**

**And Jesus responds with: “Go 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...”**

**I sort of feel bad for the Pharisees – it seems to me that maybe they are trying to get friendly with Jesus, but he doesn't seem interested – he doesn't thank them, he just uses them to pass information back to Herod. “Go tell that fox...”**

**The statement about the third day seems to be a reference to the resurrection. Jesus then goes into what is commonly referred to as the lament over Jerusalem.**

**One of the sources I used in preparing this sermon came from writings by The Right Rev. William H. Willimon, former Dean of the Chapel of Duke University and presently bishop of the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church. (Pulpit Resource, Vol. 38)**

**Willimon says that “Jesus shows no desire to speak to political power mongers. He speaks only to the faithful. He speaks only to those who work at worshipping and serving God.”**

**He also says that the prophets of Israel also did not speak to the potential invader or nation threatening Israel, rather they spoke to Israel.**

**Jesus, you will notice in reading the New Testament, spends most of his time talking to his own followers.**

**Willimon talks about how in a Conference meeting a few years back while they were busy trying to be ‘prophetic’ and tell the state what to do about handicap accessibility in state buildings, a woman stood up and called them hypocrites for not addressing the same issues within their own churches.**

**It reminded me of an experience I had some years back.**

**I was in a meeting of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Homelessness for the city of Winston-Salem. The meeting occurred around a very large U-shaped set of tables at the Salvation Army.**

**The meeting was led by a pair of very smart consultants, who made impressive presentations using Power Point technology. The consultants were well-versed in the subject matter and very familiar with the Winston-Salem situation.**

**We saw graphs and charts and lots of numbers. We heard about the surveys with homeless persons and the agencies that serve them. All of this was going along just fine. and everyone was conducting themselves in a most professional and business-like manner.**

**A county Commissioner asked a question and the Superintendent of schools replied. I think that the question had some pejorative overtones regarding homeless people.**

**A woman who had come to the meeting a bit late seemed bothered by the Commissioner's question; she begins speaking and the tone of the meeting changes.**

**This woman doesn't talk about statistics, she doesn't have any graphs – she is not using Power Point. She talks about personal things like feeling ashamed, scared --- She talks about feeling like a failed mother because she and her children have to live at a shelter. She talks about the street and the difficulty of alcohol and drug use.**

**The meeting changes; we are all looking at our shoes and are hoping that the very smart professional facilitator consultants will get us back to studying the problem of homelessness in Winston-Salem.**

**Isn't it awkward when someone pushes us beyond our normal ways of conducting business and our tacitly agreed upon rules of social engagement?**

**We love our comfort zone, and it is disconcerting when we are out of it. It is easy to talk about homelessness as long as it is about those people out there, but when they are in the room with you, that is another matter.**

**We are uncomfortable and want the comfort of our 'business as usual' processes. I don't think Jesus has that problem.**

**After he's labeled Herod as a fox, Jesus then goes on to say that he must be on his way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem. He is predicting his own death.**

**Jesus laments over his own people – Willimon points out that the lament over Jerusalem is also a lament for us. The lament is "...for God's people, the faithful who are unfaithful, Israel, the Church, for us."**

**"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it."**

**Then Jesus says, "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing..."**

**The question for us this morning might well be: How does it happen that a religion founded around the life and teaching of Jesus – who was in every way a social radical and no respecter of social conventions that include discrimination of any type – how does it happen that we have so often made that religion tepid and timid and respectable?**

**How is it that the religion of Jesus has been made too often the religion of the Comfortable Pew? (Remember that book from the Sixties?) Well, we should still be asking the question!**

**We too often try to tame Christianity. We have often done our best to domesticate Christ and Christianity to fit our comfort zone. We have too often been overly concerned with right answers and not concerned enough with right actions.**

**Is it possible that we who would attempt to walk in the footsteps of Jesus might be asked to break social custom as Jesus clearly intended to do?**

**If we are at all alive and living on the planet, we will be given the opportunity to break social custom – we will be given the challenge of crossing boundaries or rules of social convention.**

**As the Body of Christ, we are called to be a welcoming and inclusive community --- what are our barriers?**

**Do we have the courage to break them down as Jesus did?**

**Do we have the patience to listen to those who are different -- whose background and education are different? Will we allow ourselves to be vulnerable, so that we can learn about the value inherent in all human beings and not just those who look and act as we do? Will we be truly inclusive and accept the gifts and differences that are brought to us, or will we just insist that everyone is welcome as long as they become like us?**

**Will we want to insure that we are defined well within the mainstream of what we think a respectable, middle-of-the-road; no-risk, safe and successful church ought to be?**

**Some years back, I attended a presentation on the marketing of alcoholic beverages to women.**

**The title of the presentation was “Killing us softly.”**

**It talked about all the subtle and socially acceptable ways that alcoholic beverages can be marketed to women.**

**Being successful as a church runs the risk of being killed softly by the culture of success at the risk of a dead gospel slickly delivered to a self-satisfied homogeneous religious club.**

**“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it.”**