

`The Second Sunday of Lent, 16 March 2025

Readings: Genesis 15.1-12,17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3.17 - 4.1; Luke 13.31-end

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. **Amen.** (Psalm 19.14)

Jesus calls Herod a fox. It is tempting to identify and even name today's foxes. One thing I can safely say – they are many. We need not look far. Many today are blatantly happy to say black is white: untruths about science, in the political realm and elsewhere. The reduction of truth to 'my truth' and 'your truth' was and is a first sign of a culture with a rich heritage losing its bearings. For the Christian, for you and me, Jesus remains the way, the truth and the life. This is the reason we walk with him as a community during this season of Lent and especially during Holy Week. We look to him for the truth that undergirds our lives learning in turn that in him is true life, abundant life.

The Herod being referred to is not Herod the Great, but rather his son Herod Antipas (c. 20 BC – c. 39 AD) who had John the Baptist beheaded on a whim forced by circumstances to keep a promise he made not wanting to lose face. In that episode Herod Antipas is unmasked. He must play to his courtiers. He who is powerful also lives in fear. It is astonishing for us who affirm life to see how many people often sheltered in luxurious accommodation, but not only count the lives of others for little.

Staying with this finely balanced reading Jesus reconnects with the imagery of the fox towards the end of his encounter with some Pharisees who are warning him to keep away from Jerusalem, because they have heard and know Herod wants to have Jesus eliminated. Backed by the High Priest who says Caiaphas, "...it is better for us to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed" (John 11:50). Anyone who keeps or has kept chickens will know the havoc a fox will wreak in a chicken pen if through cunning it can find a way in. In contrast to Herod Jesus says of himself how he has longed to gather and protect his people, a people that were to be as numerous as the sand on the seashore and whose land was to stretch from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates. Jesus says spanning the centuries, "How often have I desired to gather your children

together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” Reminding us that again and again God came to his people to turn them back to a better way, and often they would, but again and again they would forsake him. The story of a people turning in circles can become our story, if we are tossed this way and that, if we are not rooted in Christ.

The covenantal promise to Abraham ‘To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,..’ is one that needs unpacking. Suffice it say today only that it has been superseded in a literal sense, because as Jesus says, My kingdom is not of this world! It means and points us to a kingdom not made with hands, but to the kingdom of God of which we by his sacrifice are citizens. It is a kingdom not of this world. With the psalmist we do not put our ultimate trust in chariots, or in the power of men’s legs, or even possessing land, but in God and his Kingdom. Remember this invitation? Put your hand in the hand of the man from Galilee and you will see differently! The above does not mean we are naive about the present dangers of this world, and what must be accomplished if we truly cherish liberty, our way of life, our prosperity and wish others to enjoy the same life, nor being naive about the malaise our own countries find themselves in. God comes in Jesus that we may have life and it in abundance. It isn’t the least common denominator, but a rich life. A Christian’s calling is to take hold of this abundant life. A life enabling us to see ourselves and others differently.

Earlier in today’s gospel Jesus in quick succession uses a phrase twice with slight variations. First he says, “Today and tomorrow, and on the third day...” and in the next sentence “Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day...”. Jesus is talking about time, the reality of time and how his life, his ministry and the divine purpose made manifest in him are embedded in time, as you and I experience it with one exception hinted at in the words on the third day. Words that have found their way into the Nicene Creed, “On the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures.” Reminding us that Scripture in its entirety, Old and New Testaments as well as the Apocrypha is written as a witness to Christ as Lord and Saviour, our Risen Redeemer. And why all this trouble? Why was it all so costly? The Creed holds this

fast by stating twice in slightly different forms that it is for us he became human. It is for our sake he died. It follows that it is for us and for our sake that he gave us a sign, the sign of His resurrection. His life is given for us to take hold of life as we live in the gift of eternal life. For us, for our sake, for you, for you, for you... and me. Removing the veil of death that hangs over us from the moment of our conception.

“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 away from Jerusalem.”

In these two sentences Jesus indicates he will complete his work as he continues to cast out demons and perform cures, as he keeps on doing what he does, as he keeps on keeping on, as he willingly goes forward. He does not waver. He will fulfil his divine calling; however we must remind ourselves, pinch ourselves that Jesus prayed that the cup might pass him by, the cup of death, the cup of a life-giving sacrifice. As I often pray, “Your death gives life to the world”. Why does Jesus pray that the cup might pass him by? Despite all the hardships life is precious. It is fundamentally good and to be lived fully. Jesus obviously knew this. Jesus is not world weary. There are still many who need to experience his ministry first hand. He like the prophets before him will be killed. His saving work will only be completed on the third day, when he is raised from the dead. He looks to the cross that he must face and yet he can look beyond his death to the day he will make himself known to his followers as the Risen Messiah the one who came and will come in the name of the Lord.

His life freely given is freely given for us to take hold of life here and now while living in the reality of eternal life in the present times. It is given that we may see beyond the boundary of death to the gift of life eternal being assured, inspired, ready and willing to forgive. **Stop.** I came across this saying the other day. “If you are unable to forgive it is like an enemy force has taken hold and is inhabiting you.” What a strong image! And how true!

Start again! Life is given that we may see beyond the boundary of death embracing knowingly the gift of life eternal while being assured, inspired, ready and willing to forgive,

aspiring to a love shaped by Christ's love for us, showing compassion and mercy, standing up to evil in its many disguises and all that is contrary to the will of God, being full of good works. It invites us to keep our eyes and actions firmly on the heavenly things, the godly things that issue out of Christian faith without dilution or diminishment.

Let us pray.

O heavenly Father, so assist us with thy grace, that we may continue thine in the fellowship of believers, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. **Amen.** (N.B Amended from the BCP 1662)

AI Summary: Jesus uses the imagery of a fox to describe Herod Antipas, highlighting his deceit and disregard for human life. Jesus contrasts Herod's actions with his own desire to gather and protect his people, emphasising the importance of truth and abundant life. Jesus's ministry, embedded in time, culminates in his death and resurrection, offering eternal life and the promise of forgiveness. The sermon concludes with a prayer, asking for God's grace to continue in the fellowship of the Church and in doing good works.