

Most, if not all of us have been taught by our parents that in polite company we refrain from talking about sex, politics and religion. I never asked why not; however, experience has taught me that talking about sex leads to either too much disclosure or down the rabbit hole of salacious gossip. Talking about religion or politics can lead to fighting words and lost relationships, so we avoid contentious subjects in order to preserve social harmony. These three topics can be deeply divisive and we can observe this in any newspaper, magazine, talk radio program, or social media post. Indeed, these three topics have proven to be divisive across the millennia and our LORD was polarizing in his own lifetime.

Our Gospel passage immediately points this out. Pharisees are warning Jesus to get out of town as Herod wants to kill him. We don't know precisely why some Pharisees feel compelled to warn him. Scholarship suggests that Jesus was within the phariseetical school of thought and as such, He would have had sympathetic friends or colleagues within the Pharisee community. It maybe that some

were ideologically opposite of Jesus, yet enjoyed a warm relationship with him, much like the deep friendship between Justice Antonin Scalia and Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Others posit that these Pharisees were enemies of Jesus, they want him condemned to death outside of their jurisdiction.

In making this argument scholars point to the preceding verses to this morning passage. Jesus has been teaching and healing. He has healed on the Sabbath, which scandalized the religious leadership. And he has taught in parables, telling stories about barren fig trees, faith as small as a mustard seed or as powerful as yeast, concluding that those who enter the kingdom of God must do so by the narrow door. If you want to refresh your memory on these parables, look at the beginning of chapter 13 in Luke.

There was no doubt in the Pharisees mind that Jesus' stories and actions were pointed at them. They were the barren fig tree, they lacked faith, they could not get through the narrow door. Fighting words indeed. Further, Jesus attracted a large following.

People were drawn to him, they loved what he was teaching and what he was doing. Jesus was reaching out to those on the margins of society and lifted them up. He cherished and valued them. As such, Jesus was a threat to not only the religious leadership but to the political leadership as well.

And Jesus absolutely knew it.

You can almost hear Jesus chuckle in this passage, as He says in effect: “You tell that clever, sly, duplicitous Herod for me that I’m going to keep on doing what I have been doing today, tomorrow and every day thereafter. I am going to heal the sick, I am going to preach repentance, I am going to bring about the Kingdom of God. I am going to Jerusalem, and when I am resurrected, when all can say ‘blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord,’ my mission will be complete.”

We should also hear in Jesus’ lament for Jerusalem deep compassion and sorrow for those who will not or cannot hear His message, for those who are opposed to his mission. Jesus does not lash out against his enemies, rather Jesus wants to include them and

draw them closer to God, much as a mother hen draws her brood under the shelter of her wings.

In using this analogy, perhaps Jesus was recalling the moment of creation and of God's intention for creation, for the Hebrew word for "brood" is also translated as "hover," "gently" and "cherish." So in Genesis 1:2, God brooded over, or cherished or hovered over the deep, formless void. God was gentle, all encompassing, deeply maternal at the moment of creation.¹

This is Jesus's deepest desire: to draw us all to Him, closer to God, under the wings of His protection and love, much as a mother does, with the protective fierceness of a mother. He calls us to turn toward Him and away from those things that keep us from relationship with God. We call that repentance. He knows, too that not all want to fall under His protection, preferring to exercise power and prestige in this world and ignoring that the exercise of power and prestige comes at the expense of others. Jesus is pointing out

¹ Daniel G. Defenbaugh, "Theological Perspective," *Feasting on the Word, Vol 2 Year C*, David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville KY) 2009, 72. and Olive Tree BHS Parsed Bible with Brown, Driver & Briggs (BDB) Hebrew and English Lexicon.

that relationship with God can't be bought, can't be exercised through force, can't be exerted through privilege, rather it comes through Him, the ONE who is humble and faithful to the God of creation. For this reason, Jesus will proceed with living into his call - he will go Jerusalem even if it means His death.² Jesus knows His mission doesn't end in death, it is fulfilled in His conquering death at the moment His resurrection.

This is Good News even for we who are economically advantaged or who enjoy white privilege. Our modern day equivalent of Pharisees and Romans are more than likely each one of us. Even though we aren't at society's margins, we too are invited under Jesus' wings. Turning toward Him, turning toward God means that we are willing to emulate Jesus. We understand that Jesus' mission is of the Divine. Like Jesus, we pay attention to, we afford dignity and respect to the least of our brothers and sisters. We try to remove the barriers and obstacles that keep some people from fully engaging in our community. We too are welcoming, affirming,

² Ibid, Defenbaugh.

inviting, loving, and embracing those whom we meet. We might start with finding common ground with St. George's as well as continuing engagement with the community around us. We do this with God's help. We invite others to do it with us, because we know that not enough of us are willing to do God's will in the world. We do this, too, through faithfully engaging with God much as Abram does in our reading from Genesis (15:1-12,17-18). We absolutely can ask questions of God, even if the question is "how will I know?"

"How will I know if I am doing God's work? How will I know if I'm doing my part to fully usher in God's kingdom?" The answer will come through prayer and whether our actions show results. Let us all be willing to draw in under Jesus' wings, and function as His body in the world.

AMEN.