

Second Sunday in Lent

TO BE GATHERED BY MERCY

Luke 13.31-35

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Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

31At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." 32He 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. 33Yet 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.' 34Jerusalem, 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! 35See, 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.'"

DIAGNOSIS: We Trust Rewards and Punishment

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *You Do It to Me, I'll Do It to You*

Herod had a problem with Jesus. Herod may not have liked Jesus, or he may have felt threatened by Jesus. We do not know the reason, but whatever it was, Herod wanted to kill Jesus. That attitude of wanting to hurt someone because we feel justified in doing so is common to all of us. A man who has a driving school and teaches driving classes asks the people present if they have

ever seen their mother “give the finger” to another driver. Every teenager raised there hand yes. Someone does something we do not like, we get them back. We fling curses at them. When we feel our importance has been made less, we fight back. If insulted, we insult in return. That is how to handle the situation.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Trust Is Misplaced*

When we use violence or insults to handle an event we’ve been involved in, we are using punishment. We punish bad behavior. That is how the system works. If the event was a nice thing happening to us, we reward the person. That is how the system works. Herod knew that. But not only did he know that, he trusted rewards and punishment as the way to deal with people and what they do. Rewards and punishments may be the normal way we do things. What we do not realize is that we trust rewards and punishments. We have faith in rewards and punishments. (The system of rewards and punishments is called Law.)

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Our Misplaced Trust Is Useless*

In 2 Corinthians 3:7, Paul labels the law a “ministry of condemnation.” Two verses earlier he called the law a “ministry of death.” To trust the way of rewards and punishments is to exist in the death of fear—the fear of failure, the fear of having done wrong, the fear of being punished. Such fear makes love impossible. Herod had no love for Jesus. Herod wanted to use the ministry of the law. Herod condemned Jesus and wanted Jesus dead. Such is the ministry of rewards and punishment. Not only does it kill relationships, it kill us. And while death may be seen as a reward for the long suffering and a punishment for the young or criminal, reward and punishment cannot stop death. We are without a way to overcome death. We have no means to deal with the one who is Lord over death.

PROGNOSIS: Mercy Overcomes Punishment and Death

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Mercy Comes on the Third Day*

Jesus did not live by the way of rewards and punishments. When he was threatened with harm by Herod, he did not respond with violence or “give the finger” to Herod. He did his work of mercy on the next day, tomorrow, and on the third day. He trusted a different way. He trusted his Father and the Father’s promise of mercy. Even when the way of punishment actually killed Jesus, Jesus trusted his Father. And on the third day Jesus did his work of mercy by rising from the dead! And more, he rose from the dead to raise us from death. He rose from the dead to raise us from our being dead to love, dead to love as a gift—dead in our relationship with God who is Love. Jesus raises us up to live in the life called mercy.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution) : *Trust Is Placed in Jesus*

Only when we are given mercy are we given faith in Jesus who gives us mercy. Jesus would gather us to himself like a hen gathers her brood under her wings. Jesus gathers us with mercy. When Jesus forgives us, we trust him. When Jesus offers us faith in him, we are given faith in him. (“Do not fear; only believe.”) There is room in our heart for trust in only one way. We trust the way of rewards and punishment, or we trust Jesus and his promise of mercy.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Jesus Gave Me Mercy, I’ll Give You Mercy*

We live by mercy (trust Jesus) when we forgive those who hurt us. We live by mercy (trust Jesus) when we serve those who are in need and do not require a reward or thanks. We live by mercy (trust Jesus) when we welcome people who have been condemned as worthless, as lazy, as weak, or as losers. Lent is a time we

look at how we are tempted (Lent 1) to trust rewards and punishment as the way to manage our relationships with people, and with God. We are tempted to hurt when we are hurt. We are tempted to punish those who hurt us, and to reward those who are nice to us. But to give life, to give people life with God, Jesus and his mercy are needed. We get to offer mercy. And so we pray, "Lead us not into temptation."