

It was to be destroyed again. Luke was writing well after Roman patience ran out. In 70 AD the holy city was besieged, starved and conquered, its people slaughtered, crucified and scattered.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem; how often I wanted to gather your children like a hen gathering her chickens under her wing, but you would not have it.”

The heart of Jesus was almost broken. Compassion; profound human compassion; elemental divine compassion! Here you have it. Jesus the tough character who would not give an inch to the bullying of Herod, is also one and the same Jesus the compassionate. He is the man who longed to mother the lost people of Jerusalem and who would at the last willingly give his life *“as a ransom for many”*. Their rejection of Jesus was the rejection of the greatest compassion this world has known.

Today is the second Sunday of Lent. Last Sunday we explored the temptations of short cuts and on Ash Wednesday I invited a small congregation to commit to a fasting journey which will open us up to new and different ways to experience God, the church, and the world. I've included that fasting list for you on the back of the Service for today in case you're up for it.

This Sunday I direct your gaze towards the toughness of Jesus. Learn from him; don't be diverted in your quest by bullies or anyone else. Christianity is for the brave and the tough of spirit. I also direct you towards the compassion of Jesus. His for you, and yours for others.

- A journey without compassion is not a Christian journey.
- A toughness without gentleness is not from God.

To the praise of the Name that is timeless and the Love that is boundless. Amen!!

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A Message from Mark!

The Fox & the Mother Hen

**28 February 2010 - Lent 2
Scripture ~ Luke 13:1-35**

*Go and tell that fox [Herod]: Look, I will continue to cast out demons and heal today and tomorrow; and on the third day I will finish the job. Lk 13:32
O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I wanted to gather your children like a hen gathers her chickens under her wing, but you would not have it. 13:34*

Most of us are a lot more complex than others think we are. We are neither the waste of space that some claim, nor the pure good souls our loyal friends like to recognise. There are some observers of life who boast that they can sum up a person in a few minutes. I think not. That kind of quick judgement reveals more about the judge than the judged. We are complex creatures; not easily classified and labelled.

Jesus shared our complexity, and developed depths and heights of his own. His contemporaries were often baffled by him. After 2,000 years of Christian discipleship, devotion, prayer, preaching and endless writing of books, we remain deficient in our understanding. We have embroidered him or undersold him, clung feverishly to the things we like about him or turned our backs on aspects of Jesus about which we don't want to know. Many varieties of Jesus are in the religious market.

Hans Kung, in his book *“On being a Christian”* raises the question as to which Jesus we should believe in. Kung (who I was delighted to meet at The Parliament of the World's Religions in December) offers a number of alternatives that have been popular. Here I offer you some of his versions mixed with a few of mine:

- * The sweet Jesus, surrounded by roses, red robins and a Bible text.
- * The Revolutionary Jesus, loved by the oppressed peoples of Latin America.

- * The Hero Jesus, admired by teenagers and writers of poems.
- * The Christ of the Sacred Heart, popular in some Roman Catholic devotion.
- * The God-on-earth Jesus; all halos and lightning powers, scarcely human.
- * The holy son of the beloved Virgin. Lourdes, Fatima and all that.
- * Jesus the Great Example; popular with “pull-yourself-up-with-your-shoe-strings” moralists.
- * The Super Star Jesus of the 1960’s.
- * The transfigured Christ, resplendent in the Roman catacombs.
- * The 5th century enthroned Christ, wearing the insignia of a Roman Emperor.
- * The Beggar Christ of St Francis and St Claire.
- * The Kingly Christ once extolled by European Royalty.
- * The Teacher, popular with those who think that words can cure a sick world.
- * Jesus the Wonder-Worker, honoured by Charismatics.
- * The Man of Prayer, fashionable among the mystics.
- * The Divine Lover, sought by St. Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux.
- * The Blood of the Lamb Jesus, popular among American evangelists.
- * The Omega-point-of-history Jesus, adored by Teilhard de Chardin.
- * The Doctrinally-precise Jesus, admired by many Lutherans.
- * The Social Justice Jesus, popular within the Uniting Church.
- * The Happy Dipper Jesus, essential in Baptist churches.
- * The elegant Bestower-of-blessings, renowned in the Anglican Church.

That enough? You will be relieved to know I have cut out some of the other stereotypes that came to mind. Which Jesus? From today’s reading from Luke, I hope to underline two characteristics of this remarkable, complex Jesus of Nazareth. Both are firmly rooted, not in the latter biases of the diverse Christian church, but in the Gospels.

1) The tough Jesus

Some Pharisees came to Jesus with a warning: ***“Herod is looking for you. You had better get out.”*** This was the same Herod who ordered John the Baptist’s head on a plate. A tyrant not to be toyed with, he was a son of the notorious “Herod the Great”, the killer of the infants at Bethlehem. Like his father he was both cruel and ambitious. He ruled the region around Galilee. His marriage to the insidious Herodias, made his reign even more notorious.

We don’t know whether the Pharisees who came with the warning were friendly or hostile. On one hand, Luke usually deals kindly with Pharisees. On the other hand, some Gospels mention Herod’s men and the Pharisees as being in cahoots. So maybe they came to Jesus with the best of intentions, or maybe they were Herod’s stooges, seeking to put some fear into Jesus.

The response of Jesus was tough and direct: ***“You go and tell that fox, Herod, that I continue to do my thing today and tomorrow, and on the third day I’ll complete what I’ve started.”***

Now that is a tough response to a tyrant. ***“That fox”*** - not exactly an answer Herod would hear with kindness. Jesus was a strong person, resilient in character, hard as nails when the occasion was right. This is no pretty-boy Jesus, no sentimental dreamer. Jesus knew the score. He mourned the bloody death of his cousin John. But he was not going to be intimidated. He was a man in charge of his own destiny. A tough Jesus. ***“Go tell that fox I will move on when I am ready. Not before.”***

2) The compassionate Jesus

Placed beside this picture of Jesus, is another scene depicting the compassionate Christ. A graphic juxtaposition. Luke immediately shows Jesus lamenting over the fate of Jerusalem. In fact, the word “Jerusalem” is the only connection between the Herod incident and Christ’s heart-rendering lament for the holy city.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem; How often I wanted to gather your children like a hen gathers her chickens under her wing, but you would not have it.”

There is hardly a more feminine picture of Jesus available in the Gospels. The vivid picture of a clucky hen rounding up her chickens and fluffing her feathers protectively over them shows the compassion of the Jesus whom we name as Lord and Saviour.

You and I can never fully appreciate the depth of feeling a Jew like Jesus had for Jerusalem. Idealised as the city of God, Jerusalem was woven into their prayers and conversation, into their hopes and their worst fears. No earthly place was more precious to Jesus the Jew.

But it rejected him, spurned his compassion and at the end, would hound him outside its walls to a rocky hill called “The Skull”. Luke shows us Jesus lamenting at the coming destruction.

Jerusalem had been destroyed before in the time of the prophets. The city had been reduced to rubble, the holy temple vessels taken off to a foreign palace to be used in drunken orgies. The ruins had become a desolation, a nesting place for owls and a lair for wolves.