

“Curses!”

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The First Sunday in Lent
St. Michael's Episcopal Church
Independence, MO

May I speak with the Breath of God, from the Word of God, in the Name of God. Amen.

- Today is NOT St. Patrick's Day. But we can still talk about it.
 - Because I've had my eye on Irish and Celtic spirituality for a long time now
 - And it's fascinating to look at the type of Christianity that existed in the early centuries of the Church, there at the far western edge of western civilization
 - Even before Patrick came, there was a mystical tradition there, that embraced the way of Jesus in a very nature-based expression of Faith
 - Recognizing the sanctity of every creature, and even the equality of the genders to a surprising extent
 - And recognizing human beings as co-creators of God's story in the world
 - Which is partly why Irish culture has produced so much incredible music, art and literature.
- So yes, Celtic and Irish culture are rich and beautiful
 - But, like all cultures, there is a dark side as well.
- For example, their infamous curses.
 - Although not just using "cusswords". I mean the Irish are famous for sharp, biting and very creative put-downs. For example:
 - "May you find the bees but miss the honey."
 - "May all the goats in Gorey chase you to hell."

- “May the curse of Mary Malone and her nine blind illegitimate children chase you so far over the Hills of Damnation that the Lord himself can't find you with a telescope.”
- We certainly have no lack of cursing, and insults, and angry rants in society today. But where do you usually see them?
 - Out in public? Really, How often do you see two people in public cussing each other out?
 - No, all that happens online now!
 - Or it's the talking heads on TV, criticizing someone who isn't present to defend themselves.
- But how does Jesus criticize King Herod and the powers-that-be? By passing notes to his disciples? No, he tells it to them straight, and straight to their faces.
 - One of the reasons Irish culture became known for its curses is the historic oppression they've endured.
 - There were times when the only power they had left was the power of the spoken word.
- And this is where Jesus stepped into the gap.
 - To use the power of his words to advocate for the prophets of Israel, the truth-tellers, and for all those they spoke up to protect.
- I don't preach this way very often, but maybe it would be good to pick the gospel apart a little for guidance about how we speak truth to power, and even to each other

1. First, Evaluate. Figure out whether the context is sincere. If you're confronted with a grievance, sometimes it's "not really about what it's about."

- a. Notice that I said Jesus didn't hide behind anything when offering his criticism. But you might notice that Jesus was talking to Herod through the Pharisees. Which makes it sound a little more like Reddit or Twitter (not calling it X) than like a Jesus encounter.
- b. But I would argue that he really is being direct. I don't think Herod was terribly concerned about Jesus at this point. Mentioning King Herod was a ploy on the part of the Pharisees to scare Jesus off. Which means the context is not sincere. Jesus would be wasting his time trying to address the Herod issue.

2. Second, Validate. Don't contradict. Speak on their terms.

- a. Although Jesus knows it's not really about Herod, he doesn't call them out on that.
- b. He speaks on their own terms by saying "Go tell that fox..." but who is he really speaking to? He's speaking directly to the Pharisees right in front of him.

3. Third, Remember Who You Represent

- a. Jesus is not defending himself here. He is thinking of the sick and the demon-possessed. And he is thinking of all the prophets who were killed in the past for standing up for the oppressed.
- b. Before we unleash our curses to the powers-that-be, we should ask ourselves whose sake is all this for. If you're

speaking up for those who can't speak up for themselves,
Jesus is on your side.

4. Fourth, Speak Your Own Truth.

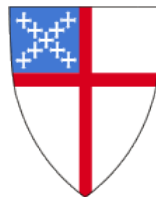
- a. Use those “I” statements. Jesus doesn’t say, “Well Herod is a loser. Admit it, you hate him too.” Instead, he says “I will keep on doing what I’m doing, and I will reach my goal.”
- b. Jesus is speaking his own truth by reminding everyone of his mission and purpose, not getting bogged down in everyone’s agendas.
- c. This can get pretty heated, and sometimes pretty biting. Jesus is fairly restrained here, but in other scenes he boils over at the Pharisees, when they’re asking for it.
- d. If you are confident in your advocacy, and prepared to handle the consequences, let those curses rip.

5. Fifth, Share Your Heart

- a. This can be done at the beginning, or at the end, ideally both. Jesus does it at the end. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem! How often I’ve desired to gather you...” Jesus is showing how much he cares. If the Pharisees in front of him love Jerusalem too, they have an opportunity to understand his heart.
- b. If you have to confront someone, don’t just build an argument, show them your heart as well. Give them an opportunity to reveal how much they care about the things and people you care about. You may not come to an agreement, but you might be able to disagree with grace.

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the Second Sunday in Lent

Year C
RCL



Genesis 15:1-12,17-18
Philippians 3:17-4:1
Luke 13:31-35
Psalm 27

The Collect

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Old Testament

Genesis 15:1-12,17-18

The word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." But the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Then he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a

female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates."

The Psalm

Psalm 27

Dominus illuminatio

- 1 The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom then shall I fear? *
the LORD is the strength of my life;
of whom then shall I be afraid?
- 2 When evildoers came upon me to eat up my flesh, *
it was they, my foes and my adversaries, who
stumbled and fell.
- 3 Though an army should encamp against me, *
yet my heart shall not be afraid;
- 4 And though war should rise up against me, *
yet will I put my trust in him.
- 5 One thing have I asked of the LORD;
one thing I seek; *
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life;
- 6 To behold the fair beauty of the LORD *
and to seek him in his temple.

- 7 For in the day of trouble he shall keep me safe
in his shelter; *
he shall hide me in the secrecy of his dwelling
and set me high upon a rock.
- 8 Even now he lifts up my head *
above my enemies round about me.
- 9 Therefore I will offer in his dwelling an oblation
with sounds of great gladness; *
I will sing and make music to the LORD.
- 10 Harken to my voice, O LORD, when I call; *
have mercy on me and answer me.
- 11 You speak in my heart and say, "Seek my face." *
Your face, LORD, will I seek.
- 12 Hide not your face from me, *
nor turn away your servant in displeasure.
- 13 You have been my helper;
cast me not away; *
do not forsake me, O God of my salvation.
- 14 Though my father and my mother forsake me, *
the LORD will sustain me.
- 15 Show me your way, O LORD; *
lead me on a level path, because of my enemies.
- 16 Deliver me not into the hand of my adversaries, *
for false witnesses have risen up against me,
and also those who speak malice.
- 17 What if I had not believed
that I should see the goodness of the LORD *
in the land of the living!
- 18 O tarry and await the LORD's pleasure;
be strong, and he shall comfort your heart; *
wait patiently for the LORD.

The Epistle

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

The Gospel

Luke 13:31-35

Some Pharisees came and said to Jesus, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." He 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. Yet 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.' Jerusalem, 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! See, 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.'"
