

## Keeping the Rage Tender

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*Texts: Luke 13: 31-35*

After a week of being bombarded by news articles about the unceasing horror of what is happening in Ukraine and the slew of laws limiting the rights of women and LGBTQ people, after two years of navigating this pandemic, in the midst of all that is floating around in our heads I got into my car to drive to church Wednesday morning with a heaviness I couldn't quite put my finger on. I turned on my radio and was met with a wall of sound since I forgot I had turned up the music the day prior on my way home. Freddie Mercury's voice sang out the words, "*Mamma, oooo, I don't want to die!*" Which was, if I'm being honest, quite shocking, making me laugh on an otherwise groggy midweek morning. I turned down the volume and thought, I'm sure this has something to teach us.

If you aren't familiar, these words come from the famous song Bohemian Rhapsody by the rock band Queen. The song is filled with drama and a range of emotions from deep sadness to anger to playful banter. It was comical to have these words blasting at me so early in the morning on a Wednesday in Lent when we often reflect on Jesus' journey to his own death and resurrection. Perhaps it was this odd connection between a song that changed the landscape of rock music, a song that broke all the rules of what was expected, and Jesus, a person who changed the landscape of the world, a life that broke all of societies' rules that delighted me. Or perhaps it was just such a relief to listen to a piece of music that was so dramatic so early in the morning in a world that continually has moments of drama leaking at the seams, or perhaps it was because it felt as dramatic as I was feeling at the moment. Whatever it was for the first time that week my head started nodding to the beat, I rolled my windows down and I sang along with a smile on my face, feeling met by a full range of emotions in the lyrics and notes of this beloved classic.

The familiar rock opera of the 70s and 80s glided into moments of desperation, utter silliness, and towards the end of the almost 6 minute journey a crescendo of guitar that lead to these words filled with righteous anger:

*So you think you can stop me and spit in my eye  
So you think you can love me and leave me to die  
Oh, baby, can't do this to me, baby,  
Just gotta get out, just gotta get right outta here*

I noticed that these words that I've listened to countless times before were rooted in protective anger and as I sang along I was reminded of the gifts of this sometimes difficult to embrace emotion: it gives us the power to mobilize, a feeling of agency, it protects and inspires, it helps us set boundaries and had me wondering if perhaps anger is tied to our sadness and care for the world as well.

This morning as we continue to reflect on how we can learn from the experiences of Jesus during this season of Lent, I wonder if these lyrics were similar to the thoughts that were going through Jesus' head as he imagined himself addressing Herod Antipas, one of the sons of Herod the Great who attempted to kill Jesus as an infant all those years ago.

Imagine Jesus singing these words to Herod:

*So you think you can stop me and spit in my eye  
So you think you can love me and leave me to die  
Oh, baby, can't do this to me, baby,*

And a chorus of Pharisees running up behind him as backup singers singing: *Just gotta get out, just gotta get right outta here.*

Excuse my silliness, but I couldn't resist.

Where would this song and dance occur, you ask? We begin with a short passage that reminds us of the journey with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem that started in Ch 9 of the Gospel of Luke. It is split into two parts, the first an expression of Jesus' righteous anger towards Herod's desire to kill him and the second a lament over the city of Jerusalem's rejection of prophets. In this section the Pharisees warn Jesus during his ministry of healing to flee because Herod is looking to kill him. To this warning he says, "Go tell that fox, 'I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.'" He calls Herod not "baby," but a fox, an animal often associated with cleverness or cunning and in rabbinical literature is often a term of contempt. Instead of fleeing in fear, Jesus uses his anger to have faith in his path and to clarify his purpose. He uses his anger, not to destroy or to harm, but to point to the truth and to speak against violence. He digs deeper into the hope that he has, that healing will come to pass in the days ahead. With the help of his anger, Jesus finds a way to communicate hope and trust in God's liberating work in the world.

In the second half of our passage we get this beautiful image of Jesus describing himself as a mother hen with her baby chicks, yearning to shelter those who have rejected him under his wing. This image of gentleness in the midst of righteous anger and lament can remind us of how close the two emotions can be.

Some Bibles label this passage from Luke the lament for Jerusalem, tying Jesus' anger to a state of lament for what is to come as he journeys to the cross. Sometimes when we are at our most angry there is a small part of us whispering that if we weren't so angry we would be deeply sad, lamenting the trigger of our anger. This might be a familiar chorus to the rhythm of our lives lately because there is much fuel for our anger. We might be angry at time we have lost with loved ones the past two years, angry at chronic illness or disability that has robbed us of a feeling of normalcy in our bodies or relationships, angry at God that we lost a loved one too soon, angry that laws are limiting the safety of our LGBTQ siblings in their schools and homes, angry at the lack of affordable housing or that the

gender pay gap still exists, angry that in the midst of plague there is also war. We could go on... We feel righteous anger because we know that a better world is possible, that God is calling us into a path that heals instead of divides, loves instead of hates, makes peace instead of war. Our anger points to the truth of our hope still bubbling up beneath our rage, beneath our lament, our hope that keeps our connection to our gentleness alive.

Our anger is a helper and a friend, a voice pointing us to wisdom within and to the wisdom of God. It took me a long time to realize this, that my anger was not something to be buried deep down within me, but that it could be a partner in my own and other's healing. I learned recently that one of my favorite quotes about emotion comes from an American boxing coach who worked with Mike Tyson - goes to show that I know nothing about boxing. In any case the quote is this: "Emotions, particularly anger, are like fire. They can cook your food and keep you warm, or they can burn your house down." - (Cus D'amato) I was afraid that if I felt my anger it would burn my house down, that there was nothing good about this emotion. As a child I was told that to be a good girl, to be a good woman and by extension a good Christian I was expected to be nice, to not cause conflict, to make myself smaller, but as an adult I found that being nice all the time was violence in its own way. I needed access to both my anger and to my kindness, access to both holy rage and to my gentleness. To be fully human and fully present to my work in the world I had to make friends with an anger that left room for hope and care for others, an anger that seeks to speak against violence.

Last week, I was introduced to a poem called "therapy" by Nayyirah Waheed during a talk about restorative justice, a model of justice that is focused on repairing harm without doing more violence to get there, and it has been staying with me ever since. It goes like this:

the hard season  
Will split you through.  
do not worry.

you will bleed water.  
do not worry.  
this is grief.  
your face will fall out and  
down your skin  
and  
there will be scorching.  
but do not worry.  
keep speaking the years from  
their hiding places.  
keep coughing up smoke  
from all the deaths you have  
died.  
keep the rage tender.  
because the soft season will  
come.  
it will come.  
loud.  
ready.  
gulping.  
both hands in your chest.  
up all night.  
up all of the nights.  
to drink all damage into love.

The poet calls us to keep the rage tender, to accept the scorching and the grief and in our rage to have hope that a softer season will come to us. Jesus' approach to anger in our passage from this morning tells us this as well, that our anger has a purpose: to clarify what is important, to motivate us to work for change, to even become aware of how we've been wounded, to inspire us to tell our truth and God's. It also tells us that there is still hope to be had in the world. It is powerful and tender, clear and soft, calling us all into truth, into hope, and into deeper relationship with one another with the help of the

Holy Spirit. So, the next time you feel that sacred burn in your chest and your cheeks, take a deep and gentle breath and say thank you to your anger and to God for this gift, reminding yourself of that tender anger of Jesus that leaves room for lament and hope too.

May it be so.

