



**“GOOD TROUBLE”**  
**SCRIPTURE: PSALM 27; LUKE 13: 31-35**  
**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**  
**March 17, 2019**  
The Rev. Dr. Marcia Mount Shoop, Pastor

**Psalm 27**

27:1 The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

27:2 When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh-- my adversaries and foes-- they shall stumble and fall.

27:3 Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

27:4 One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.

27:5 For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.

27:6 Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

27:7 Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!

27:8 "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, LORD, do I seek.

27:9 Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!

27:10 If my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will take me up.

27:11 Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.

27:12 Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence.

27:13 I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

27:14 Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

The Word of the LORD.  
**Thanks be to God.**

### **Luke 13:31-35**

13:31 At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."

13:32 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.

13:33 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.'

13:34 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!

13:35 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.'"

The Word of the LORD.  
**Thanks be to God.**

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### ***The Fox and the Grapes***

***One afternoon a fox was walking through the forest and spotted a bunch of grapes hanging from over a lofty branch. "Just the thing to quench my thirst," the fox said.***

***Taking a few steps back, the fox jumped and just missed the hanging grapes. The fox took a few steps back, ran, jumped, and tried to reach the grapes but still could not reach them.***

***After several more tries, the fox gave up. He turned up his nose and said, "What a fool I am. Here I am wearing myself out to get a bunch of grapes that are probably sour. They are not worth it. Who wants those grapes anyway?"***

***And off he walked resentfully.***

***The moral of the story: Many pretend to despise and belittle that which is beyond their reach.<sup>1</sup>***

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When you hear Pharisees, think the keepers of the institution; think the powers that be. They wanted what Jesus had—and they weren't even sure what that was—they just knew he had some kind of power, some kind of presence, some kind of something that was hitting nerves in their spheres of influence, in their culture, in their psyche.

Don't mistake their offer in our passage today for a friendly warning to Jesus about Herod's intention to kill him.

There are not other examples anywhere in Luke of Jesus and the Pharisees getting along. Theirs is a contentious relationship—and it mostly consists of Jesus offending them and doing things that upset them. Even when they invited him to table fellowship, Jesus ends up criticizing them and calling them out every single time.

Our passage today is a curiosity to some—why would these keepers of the institution warn Jesus, why would they want to help Him? Given the tenor of their relationship, it is more likely these power brokers were seeing if they could derail Jesus—knock him off his game.

Would this man who violated so many rules and offended so many of their sensitivities turn out to have a weak spot, a character flaw they could capitalize on? Would he turn out to be self-interested if he found out his life is in danger?

Maybe they could derail his progress on the road to Jerusalem.

*"You better get out of here, Jesus. Herod wants to kill you."*

*"Go and tell that fox something for me," Jesus says.*

Far from taken in by their feigned friendship, Jesus squares his shoulders and affirms his resolve.

*"I'm going to keep doing what God has called me to do. And I am prepared to see this through to the end."*

There are lots of ways to make trouble, friends. But good trouble, well, good trouble only comes one way.

Good trouble starts with trusting God's power, not the powers that be.

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*Theme 1*

The Lord is my light, my light and sal - va - tion: in  
 God I trust; in God I trust. The

Chords: Dm, G, Dm, G, Dm, G, Dm, G

Repeat signs and asterisks are present above the first and last notes of the first line.

A fermata and the text "Last time" are above the final note of the second line.

***The Fox and the Rooster***

***A fox came toward a rooster and said to him, "I would like know if you can sing as well as your father did." The rooster shut his eyes and began to cry and sing and the fox grabbed the rooster and carried him away.***

***The townspeople saw the fox carrying the rooster and cried out: "The fox is getting away with our rooster!"***

***The rooster said to the fox, "My lord, do you understand what the people are saying? They are saying you are taking their rooster? You should tell them that I am your rooster and not theirs."***

***The fox opened his mouth and said: "It is not your rooster. It is my rooster."***

***And the rooster escaped from the fox's mouth and flew up into a tree.***

***Then the rooster said to the fox, "Your words are lies, because I am their rooster and not yours."***

***The fox began to hit the ground with his mouth and head, saying, "Mouth, you talk too much! You would have eaten the rooster if you just hadn't talked."***

***Moral: Too much crowing can cost you.<sup>2</sup>***

A Manifesto, a Go Pro, and Facebook live are tools of terror, tools of false belonging, tools of violence, tools of white supremacy.

The shooter in the New Zealand mosque found his identity, his tribe on his travels through Europe, moving through the land of colonizers and immigrants and bloody history with the lens given to him by his cyber brotherhood of white nationalists and fascist wanna be's.

He lives a world a way from America, but still evokes the name of our president and our 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment as part of what wrote his deadly script.

Some may write off the racists and xenophobic rhetoric of our time as the blustering of fools. Be careful with the distance we try to create between such vitriol and the white supremacy that supports the way of life we enjoy in this country.

We may wince at the word of white nationalists, but we have fed the beast with our tepid responses to systemic racism for generations. We have nurtured the annihilating impact of white supremacy with our defensive responses to the cries of black, brown, and indigenous bodies in this country.

When our lives are on the line, when our way of life is under threat, who do we align ourselves with—the powerful, or the marginalized?

How much longer can we hide behind our “progressive” cover—the cover that we want to believe puts us on the moral high ground above the racism we claim to hate?

Jesus said to the institutional power brokers, to the keepers of order and the status quo, Jesus says to us:

*“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.”*

*13:34 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!*

*13:35 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.'”*

Go tell that fox, Jesus said—I don't need your social acceptance, your social capital, your maintenance of your powerful institutions, or your fair weather commitment to justice—I will follow God all the way to a place of utter rejection and shame, to a place of suffering and betrayal, when the healing of the world is at stake.

You see good trouble isn't just about disruption. It's about redemption—it's about the world's deepest wounds not being violated yet again by hatred or by apathy, but being dressed finally with the healing balm of God's transforming love.

Good trouble does not seek notoriety; it builds beloved community.

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God I trust; in God I trust. The

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### ***The Fox and the Crow***

***A Fox once saw a crow fly off with a piece of cheese in its beak and settle on a branch of a tree.***

***“That’s for me. I am a fox,” said the fox as he walked up to the foot of the tree.***

***“Good-day, Mistress Crow,” the fox shouted up to the crow. “How well you are looking today: how glossy your feathers; how bright your eye. Your voice is more beautiful than the other birds, just like your figure is. If I could hear just one song from you, then I could call you the Queen of Birds.”***

***The Crow lifted up her head and began to caw her best. The minute she opened her mouth the piece of cheese fell to the ground. And the fox snapped it up.***

***“That will do,” said the fox.***

***“Your cheese was all I wanted. And in exchange for it before I go I will give you a piece of advice, “Do not trust flatterers.”***

***Moral: The flatterer lives at the expense of those who will listen to him.<sup>3</sup>***

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When did church become a place that coddled the powerful in this country? When did Christianity become an apologist for white supremacy culture?

While the narratives of brave pilgrims risking it all for a new life, held in the palm of God's hand, sojourning in a strange land to fulfill God's promise of abundant life have long been music to our American ears, the same song has twisted us into a collective delusion that has now come home to roost.

This week Richard and I attended a Faith 4 Justice meeting with about 30 other faith leaders in our area at the Hopkins Chapel AME Zion Church, where we explored together how we as faith leaders can work to dismantle white supremacy within ourselves and in our community.

My conversation partner in our reflection time pointed out that our country would be a different place today if those who claim to follow Jesus actually followed Him. "People are not willing to lose things; they are not willing to risk their lives to follow Him."

In the Civil Rights movement, people of color and their true allies were ready to lose their lives in following Jesus on the road to freedom. Following Jesus came at a cost—and far from counting that cost, they set their sights on the ultimate prize of a world transformed—singing like the Psalmist "I believe I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living."

Theologian James Cone put it even more strongly:

Those who want to know who God is and what God is doing must know who black persons are and what they are doing. This does not mean lending a helping hand to the poor and unfortunate blacks of society. It does not mean joining the war on poverty! Such acts are sin offerings that represent a white way of assuring themselves that they are basically "good" persons. Knowing God means being on the side of the oppressed, becoming *one* with them, and participating in the goal of liberation. *We must become black with God!*<sup>4</sup>

Cone is not referring here to the color of our skin, but to the geography of our hearts and souls—are you comfortable with the powerful, or are you in solidarity at the margins? Because, make no mistake, he believes you can't be both.

Only on the margins will we meet God. Only there will we meet Christ.

Good trouble is about the company that we keep, that hard inner work that we are willing to do—and the lengths to which we're willing to go for God's promise of liberation.

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Theme 1

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Chords: Dm, G, Dm, G, Dm, G, Dm, G

Repeat signs: \* at the beginning and end of the first line, and at the end of the second line.

Label: Last time above the final G chord.

### ***The Fox and the Fish***

***The Romans told the Jewish people they could no longer study Torah in public, but Rabbi Akiva still sat in a public place teaching and studying Torah to a group of students. Fearing for the great Rabbi Akiva's life, a man asked the Rabbi, "Aren't you afraid of the Roman government?"***

***Rabbi Akiva answered with a story.***

***Once, a fox was walking hungrily alongside a river looking for his next meal when he saw a group of scrumptious fish swimming in schools. They were just out of his reach.***

***The fox called out to the fish, 'What are you running from?'***

***"We're trying to avoid the nets that fishermen cast out to catch us," the fish said.***

***The fox had a sly thought and said to the fish, "I know of another stream across the woods where there are no fishermen, and I will gladly carry you there so you can continue on your way safely."***

***The fish weren't fooled. "Aren't you supposed to be the cleverest of all the animals? You aren't so clever after all! If we're in danger here in the water, which is our home, how much more so would we be in danger on your back and out of the water!"***

***Rabbi Akiva, said to the man: "So it is with us. If we're in danger when we sit and learn, teach and practice Torah, of which it is written "For that is your life and the length of your days," (Deuteronomy 30:20), how much worse off we will be if we do not learn, teach, and practice the Torah!"***

***And Rabbi Akiva continued teaching.***



***The Rabbi, among Judaism’s greatest leaders, was later arrested and tortured to his death. One of his students asked him once how he could continue to teach Torah even though it meant his death. Rabbi answered, ‘All my life I have wanted to understand the commandment “You shall love God with all your heart, soul and might” (Deuteronomy 6:5), and now I understand.’<sup>5</sup>***

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Jesus following is not about safety or acceptability. It is about a way of life that knows and lives and breathes good trouble—trouble that disrupts the powers and principalities, trouble that lets go of fear and takes hold of the freedom we find in Christ’s revolutionary love, trouble that resists the temptation to give up or give in.

If we truly count ourselves among those who are willing to follow Jesus to Jerusalem—and really follow him, not just to the hollow shouts of his entry into that divided city, but follow him all the way to the cross that bears hard truth, that brings forth the excruciating labor pains of new life, that calls on the world to die to our distorted, contorted, destructive ways, then we must first trust the God who made us to live in right relationship with everything that lives and breathes.

And right relationship includes accountability, right relationship includes the deep inner work that surfaces how we are doing harm so we can change our ways. Right relationship is born in good trouble—troubling in our souls, troubling of our comfortable distance, troubling the stagnant waters of the status quo.

The moral of the story: good trouble is Good News for a world held captive to the powers that be. Because good trouble is the road Jesus invites us to take to be set free.

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<sup>1</sup> One of Aesop’s Fables  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> James Cone, *Black Liberation Theology*, 69.

<sup>5</sup> A Talmudic Tale