

TFTD 2025.18 Tuesday March 25th

We have the stars: Luke 13.18-35



Some Pharisees came and said to Jesus, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” Jesus said to them, “Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, today and tomorrow I cast out demons and perform cures, and the third day I finish my course. Nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following; for it is not possible for a prophet to be killed outside Jerusalem’.”

I wonder how many of you like old black and white movies? One of my favourites is a film called “Now, Voyager” starring Bette Davis as Charlotte Vale. Charlotte is an overweight, neurotic young woman who is completely dominated by her mother. She has no sense of self-worth. She has a nervous breakdown and as part of her recovery her psychiatrist recommends that she take a cruise. Away from her mother’s influence, she’s a changed woman. She loses weight, recovers her self-confidence and her joie de vivre. On the open seas she meets and falls in love with Jerry, a married man who has stayed with his unhappy marriage because of his daughter whom he adores. After all sorts of ups and downs, Charlotte ends up caring for Jerry’s fragile daughter. She realizes that she

can never marry this man she loves, but through his daughter she can be close to him. In the final scene of the movie, the pair gaze up at the night sky, and she says, tearfully, “Oh Jerry, don’t let’s ask for the moon. We have the stars.” It’s the cry of a woman who looks back on her life, knows that it hasn’t been perfect, knows that she hasn’t been perfect, but has learnt to give thanks for what she has.

Now just park that for a minute and let’s turn to our passage from Luke’s Gospel. Some Pharisees come to Jesus and tell him to go back home because Herod wants to kill him. A very real threat because Herod had already done away with John the Baptist. Jesus’ immediate reaction is to refer to Herod as “That fox.” Hardly diplomatic language to use for someone who has the power of life and death over you. Jesus knows that he is living in very volatile times. The world has become a dangerous place. His immediate overlord can order the execution of innocent people on a mere whim. He can turn the world upside down. (Sounds familiar?) So Jesus casts aside human niceties. He names Herod for what he is, a fox. And then He stresses his determination to carry on with his ministry despite the dangers. “Behold I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow and the third day I finish my course.” And then again he looks to Jerusalem with no confidence in a happy ending. “Behold, Jerusalem, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” Those are the words of a man who knows that life is not perfect but who trusts that he comes in the name of the Lord. He is looking to the stars.

In this season of Lent, we are encouraged to examine ourselves, to repent of our faults so that we can go forward in faith. When you reach my advanced age, you have the privilege of being able to look back on many years and you can discern that same pattern of light and darkness, good times and bad times, moments of hope and moments of despair.

Last week Gaynor and I had a Winter break in Majorca. I heard on the news that there was to be a rare phenomenon in the night sky. All seven planets, Mars, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Mercury would be visible just after sunset. Too good to resist. Just after 6.30, I went outside and gazed upwards. The sky was clear. I confess I could not make out all

seven planets. But what I did see was overwhelming. Millions of points of light illuminating the night sky. My first thought was of my own insignificance. Just how small are we in terms of the immensity of our multiple universes. Is that a cause for despair or of hope and confidence? My second thought, the lasting one, is that the creator of this wonderful, magnificent world is the one who has picked me out, poured his love upon me and promised to be with me always even unto the ends of the earth.

We know that Jesus had his moments of despair: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" On his last night of freedom, in the Garden of Gethsemane, as he asked his Father if it was possible to take this cup away from him, did he look upwards to the stars? But in these volatile days, or in our moments of personal darkness, we could do well to listen and heed the words of Bette Davis. "Oh Jerry, don't let's ask for the moon. We have the stars."

Many thanks to Ernie Rea for today's Thought for the Day, based on his sermon for the second Sunday in Lent.