

## Podcast Transcript

3.13.22 Lent 2C

- [Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18](#) •
- [Psalm 27](#) •
- [Philippians 3:17-4:1](#) •
- [Luke 13:31-35](#) or [Luke 9:28-36, \(37-43a\)](#)

<<Music: “Building Up a New World,” 1st verse, fade out under opening sentence.>>

<<“We are building up a new world, builders must be strong.”>>

### Intro:

- Beloveds, welcome back to The Word Is Resistance, the podcast where we’re exploring what our Christian sacred texts have to teach us about living, surviving, even thriving in the context of empire, tyranny, violence, and repression - the times in which we are living today. What do our sacred stories have to teach us, as white folks, about our role in resistance, in showing up, in liberation?
- What wisdom is there for us as white Christians in these troubled, violent times of pandemics and racial capitalism, and the beauty of resistance?
- I’m Rev. Anne Dunlap, pronouns she/her/hers. I’m a United Church of Christ minister and I’m the faith organizing coordinator for Showing Up Racial Justice (SURJ). I live in the place currently called\* Buffalo, NY, here in the homelands of the Haudenosaunee and Erie peoples.
- This podcast is a project of SURJ-Faith and is particularly designed for white Christians – white Christians talking to other white Christians about race and white supremacy. We believe white Christians like us, like me, have a responsibility to commit ourselves to *resisting* white supremacy, to speaking up and showing up and disrupting white supremacy where we find it, including in our own Christian tradition.
- *And we do this work remembering* “We are building up a new world.” This live recording of Dr. Vincent Harding’s song for the freedom movement is of a multi-racial “movement choir practice” in Denver, CO in December 2014, being led by Minister Daryl J. Walker. We are deeply grateful to the Freeney-Harding family for letting us use the song for this podcast.
- The Word is Resistance.

It is good to be with y’all again. We had our first-ever podcast meetup last week and it was so good to actually meet some of you in virtual-person and hear your stories about what the podcast means to you. Some of you found us for the first time because of the meetup, and we’re so glad you’re here! So welcome, welcome back, we’re grateful for each one of you sharing this space with us each week.

Another exciting bit of news is – as I'm working on this episode, we are sitting at 99,910 listens all time. So by the time you are listening to this, we'll have rolled over the odometer to over ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND total listens over these five years, which I find just incredible.

Maybe you - yes you - are the one who puts us over the top this week! Thank you!

Given the state of the world these days,  
I think it's important to notice the good things too,  
Like spaces for building community,  
And the impact of good and hard work,  
Of bulbs doing what they are supposed to do  
And bursting up through the cold earth,  
The care so many of insist on for one another,  
Even while our hearts ache beyond our capacity to hold the grief.

So let's hold on to those good things  
As we move through Lent,  
– Yes, I said hold on to the good things during Lent –  
And hold on to the good things  
as we dive into this week's text,  
Which brings its own challenges for us.

Here's the text we're gonna focus on, from Luke's gospel:

*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.'"*

<<Music interlude, verse 2 of “Building Up a New World.”>>  
<<“Courage, sisters, brothers, people: don’t get weary, though the way be long.”>>

If you’ve listened to The Word Is Resistance for a while,  
You know we have a commitment at SURJ and on this podcast  
to dismantle antisemitism as part of our work to dismantle white supremacy.  
We push against antisemitic readings of the Bible  
In almost every episode, and sometimes  
Whole episodes will take that on explicitly,  
And this reading from Luke and its positioning  
At the near-beginning of Lent offers us that opportunity.

If you were at our meet-up  
Some of this may sound familiar  
As it’s part of what I shared that evening,  
But as promised, I’m going deeper.

A few weeks ago, I was talking with a Jewish colleague, April Rosenblum,  
who said, “When Christians celebrate, Jews suffer.”

What we mean here is the theological celebration  
Of Christians at Christmas, at Easter,  
And other liturgical times - the celebration  
Of the triumph of Christianity over –  
well, the world, over “evil,” over “sin,” over, yes, Judaism.

This theological celebration has certainly been true historically,  
and we talked about the pattern in Europe of the rise in pogroms  
and other forms of Christian violence against Jews during Lent  
and particularly during Holy Week and Easter.

However, I noticed that she used the present tense,  
And it made me think.

*When Christians celebrate, Jews suffer.*

This pattern is true today, and no less true in “liberal, progressive” Christian churches.  
We are all telling the same story,  
which is that the gospel story is Jesus against the Jews,  
Jesus against Judaism,  
or at a minimum Jesus against the Pharisees –

which isn't really better  
because in our Christian imagination  
Pharisees are a stand-in for Jews and Judaism anyway.

For progressives, we talk about it like:  
Jesus freeing Jewish women from patriarchy, or  
Jesus breaking restrictive Jewish purity laws, or  
Jesus being about justice while the Pharisees are nit-picking over sabbath laws, or  
Jesus caring about the poor and marginalized with the implication that Judaism does not.  
Even when we are clear that Rome killed Jesus, not "the Jews,"  
we are still often blaming "the Jews"  
for getting in the way of Jesus's work.

As Dr. Amy-Jill Levine points out in her work,  
all of those things I just named are inventions by Christians.  
They are made up untruths;  
slanders, she says, about a beautiful, complex religious tradition.  
These inventions serve to excuse the power we Christians hold in the world.  
They enforce antisemitism,  
including how it exists structurally,  
and prevent us from a clear understanding  
of both the biblical text and  
how to understand our current political situation.

It's not enough to simply affirm that Jesus and Paul were Jewish, or  
to talk about the Christian-Jewish "split" as a "messy divorce"  
that we only hear one side about, or  
to change "the Jews" to "religious authorities,"  
and so think we've avoided the problem,  
or have corrected centuries of embedded messaging and theology.

Without a very clear power analysis both  
of the texts and their historical contexts,  
we are limited in what our interpretation can do  
to actually counter antisemitism in ways  
that can change systems and structures, and even our theologies.

Lent is a particularly challenging time,  
because historically *and today*,  
Christianity highlights *even more than usual*

the conflict surrounding Jesus in our storytelling,  
with the lectionary editors often slicing up  
bits of the narratives that certainly make it *sound like*  
the primary conflict is between Jesus and Judaism.  
That conflictual liturgical storytelling  
builds through Lent into Holy Week and Jesus's execution.

The lectionary readings this year,  
Both the gospels and Paul's writings, are no exception.  
This year the focus is on Luke,  
who often gets let off the hook when we talk about antisemitism in the Bible.  
We are usually focusing on John, or Matthew, or Paul.

However, I think Luke in some ways is even worse,  
because Luke, whoever the author was, was clearly not Jewish.  
He is a gentile, a Roman citizen,  
who is writing about Jesus and the early church in Acts  
at least 2 generations after the events he describes, if not more,  
and as my New Testament professor told us,  
It's pretty clear he has never even set foot in Judea, much less Jerusalem.  
He is a gentile writing to a gentile audience,  
to make the Jesus movement palatable for gentiles.  
For Romans.

Luke is, I think, someone who as a gentile  
did not understand the power analysis  
of the stories he was working from,  
nor the experience of Judeans and Galileans under Roman oppression.  
Thus you end up with the Jews, in particular the Pharisees,  
not understanding Jesus,  
but the Roman citizens or collaborators (such as tax collectors)  
being much more open.

Sure, Romans throw Paul in jail a few times in Acts,  
but the Roman jailers get converted,  
Herod and the Roman leaders are seen as reasonable,  
and it is the Jewish leaders who are seen as murderous.  
Paul the gentile-converter is the hero,  
while the community struggling under Roman oppression  
in Judea and Jerusalem become nearly invisible,

their leader Peter seen as wrong until he “converts”  
to being ok with converting gentiles.  
Paul isn’t even executed by Rome when Luke’s narrative concludes.

What we see in Luke is the well-meaning, good-intentioned ally to a movement,  
whose power analysis, or lack of it,  
flattens and invisibilizes the role of Rome’s oppression in this story.  
It’s kind of like if a white Northerner  
were telling the story of the Southern freedom movement  
to invite white people to support it,  
but focused on tactical disagreements in the Black church  
rather than how government, police, and the Klan  
worked hand in hand to violently repress the movement,  
and attributed movement wins to LBJ’s good intentions  
rather than the years of Black-led organizing of thousands of folks on the ground.

What Luke ends up doing here  
is contributing gears and screws and bolts  
to the machinery that will become antisemitism,  
how it functions to deflect our attention away from  
the actual power holders to blame Jews for the troubles of the world.  
That’s the power analysis of Rome’s Christianity,  
deflecting our attention away from Rome and telling lies about Jews and Judaism.  
That’s the power analysis antisemitism relies on to this day.

So I am telling you:  
The power analysis we need is  
that the gospel stories are not about Jesus against the Jews,  
but about the Jewish people, including Jesus, against Roman oppression.  
Most of the New Testament  
is the story of Jewish resistance,  
including resistance through Jewish religious practice,  
and including ways in which the Jewish community  
doesn’t always agree about what that resistance should look like,  
or if there should be resistance at all.  
Very human and very messy and very much like us today!

As I have said many times on the podcast,  
as christianity more and more became the religion of Romans  
and eventually of the conquering Roman empire,

that story of Jewish resistance against Roman oppression –  
that story had to be shut down, and turned into something else.

And that story -

A story of good guys celebrating victory over bad guys,  
A story individual piety and the disposability of the perceived “unpious,”  
A story of a humanity so depraved we ALL cheered  
The execution of our own brother,  
And that that execution, and accepting its necessity  
through the conversion of our sinful individual selves,  
was the only way to get God to love us –  
That story has done immense, immense  
Amounts of harm including feeding everything  
We are trying to dismantle about white supremacy.  
Not only race, but also class and capitalism,  
Gender, relationship to land, everything.

So we as white Christians committed  
To collective liberation,  
have a mutual interest in  
Fighting antisemitism.  
We have a stake in correcting our power analysis,  
Watching always for that deflection,  
That attempt by the dominant tradition  
To take our eyes off Rome.

<<Music interlude, verse 2 of “Building Up a New World.”>>  
<< “Courage, sisters, brothers, people: don’t get weary, though the way be long.”>>

So where does that leave us with this week’s gospel reading?

Let’s hear it again because I’ve said a lot since then:

*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.'"*

So first of all, one of the ways the “deflection” tactic works  
Is that it teaches us to always assume  
That the Pharisees are the bad guys.  
That they are only and always there to antagonize Jesus.  
Even when the text is ambivalent, like this one,  
Or the text shows there’s a relationship of respect,  
If not actual friendship.  
Even when there’s evidence that Jesus was actually a Pharisee!  
(I know!)

This is not to say there weren’t Pharisees  
Who collaborated with Rome,  
Or who thought assimilation would keep them safe.  
But the Pharisees were also the ones  
Tearing Roman war eagles out of the temple  
And participating in protests and labor strikes  
Against Roman repression.  
Pharisees were lots of things.  
Remember what I said before about  
Flattening the story into good guys and bad guys?  
That doesn’t help us to notice how human these stories are,  
How complicated it is to live under oppressive regimes,  
And how necessary it is for folks with access  
To share their insider info with movement leaders.

And so with today’s reading,  
There is no reason to think the Pharisees here  
Are trying to rush Jesus off  
To save their own skin.



No, I think they are giving him some good insider info,  
They're using whatever insider access they have  
To make sure Jesus knows the scoop,  
Knows what Herod is plotting,  
So that they can all together decide what to do.

Although I usually push back on claiming  
That white Christians are the Pharisees in the gospel stories –  
We aren't, we're the gentiles –  
That's still actually a good lesson for those of us  
Who have access to dominating power:  
Contribute to the liberation movement by  
Sharing the insider info you have!

Second, the “deflection” teaches us to assume  
That when Jesus is lamenting over Jerusalem,  
What he must mean is Jerusalem represents  
Jews and Judaism,  
And-or a whole “sinful” humanity that destroys Jesus,  
Rather than “Jerusalem” as a broad-stroke shorthand for  
Those who hold dominating power and are  
Using it against the people and their prophets.  
Like how we say “Texas is so transphobic” when what we mean  
Is actually the small group of white Christian power holders.

The prophetic critique of the power structure in Jerusalem  
Is not that unusual, we find it in places throughout our scripture;  
However,  
That critique is almost always directed toward the powerful,  
While lifting up the suffering of the people,  
The brood Jesus longs to gather together under their wings, and  
Naming what it will take to build a thriving community for all.

So we want to remember here in Jesus's time  
that the power structure that is doing the killing and the stoning -  
The execution of John the Baptist by Herod, for example -  
Is a power structure put in place by Rome  
To do Rome's bidding –  
To assure that tribute and the fruits of the people's labor  
Goes to line Rome's coffers and protect Rome's power.

That power structure includes  
That “fox” Herod, as well as Roman-appointed  
High-level temple officials,  
And of course the Roman military and functionaries  
That run the city.

And so let’s consider that what Jesus means here is all that,  
including, “*That fucker Herod who killed my cousin John.*”

All of that is legit to be mad about.  
To anguish over.

The danger of the traditional, deflecting power analysis of this text  
Is that it confuses us about who to be mad at,  
Or if we should even be mad at all.  
And in fact, I think what ends up happening  
Is that text becomes about posturing ourselves as the good ones,  
We feel good about ourselves because  
We’re the good Christians who aren’t Pharisees or foxes.  
That deflection actually disconnects us  
From naming what is actually happening to us,  
And disconnects us both from our righteous anger  
and from being able to access our grief, our anguish,  
And especially our ability to grieve collectively.

And that grief, that anguish,  
Is really important to our work for collective liberation,  
Because it’s the grief and anguish  
That tells us that something is deeply wrong.  
It feels TERRIBLE, believe me,  
But it is part of the compass that guides us.

So I want us to imagine this story  
With that deflection corrected, that power analysis corrected.  
I want us to imagine  
This little community of Jewish rabble-rousers gathered  
Somewhere on the road to Jerusalem,  
Maybe in a little town, or maybe at a farm,  
Maybe sitting around a table,  
Or under a tree outside the house,

Taking a break after teaching and healing  
And trekking across the country.  
And Jesus's Pharisee friends come,  
And tell him, in anguish, that Herod is going to kill him.

And Jesus's heart breaks,  
For himself, and his people.  
He's clear on his purpose, he's going to keep going,  
*And* he knows the extent to which dominating power will do anything,  
Anything, to keep itself in power.  
I imagine his voice cracking as he moves his arms like wings,  
He wants so badly to keep his people safe,  
And his community gathered there,  
They lean into each other, brooding,  
Tears in their eyes maybe,  
Grieving together the violence that this system relies on,  
Is happy to perpetuate  
On their own bodies.

Maybe Luke's power analysis is off,  
But the power of this story cannot be contained,  
It still shines through:  
The necessity of holding each other,  
of naming dominating power for what it is,  
of grieving together the violence the system relies on.

Because we are still grieving it.  
Every damn day.

Getting our power analysis right  
Helps us to know we are not alone in that grief,  
Helps us to know how to move to create lasting change.  
And helps us know how to hold the complexities  
Of living under empire,  
And to not blame the wrong people  
For the troubles of the world.

<<Music interlude, verse 2 of "Building Up a New World.">>  
<<"Courage, sisters, brothers, people: don't get weary, though the way be long.">>

*[Call to Action and outro]*

For your call to action, I invite you to do a few of things to deepen our collective commitment to fighting antisemitism.

One is: learn more about antisemitism and how it functions to uphold white supremacy. We maintain a [resource list about Countering Antisemitism](#), where you'll find tons of articles, webinars, books, podcasts, and more. The link is in the transcript, on our website, and we'll share it on social media as well:

I'll highlight and link in the transcript 2 pieces from that list that are good starting points:

April Rosenblum, "[The Past Didn't Go Anywhere](#)"

Jews for Racial & Economic Justice (JFREJ): "[Understanding Anti-Semitism](#)" -- Download PDF from the link

- New in 2021! "[Unraveling Antisemitism](#)" poster, a companion piece to the above resource.

JFREJ's webinars with us several years ago helped me understand this machinery of deflection that defines how antisemitism functions. Those are also on the resource list, and I also invite you to [make a contribution](#) to support their incredible organizing work.

Finally, speak out! When you notice antisemitism happening, say something. Especially when it's happening in our churches. I'll warn you that once you understand this deflection tactic, you'll start noticing it everywhere: liturgies, hymns, everywhere. It can feel overwhelming, but correcting this deflection is part of the work that needs to happen to build a world where everyone thrives, and to build a theology that celebrates everyone thriving, not a thriving for some at the expense of others. We are in it together.

Thanks as always for joining us from wherever you are on this good earth. We'd love to hear from you all, especially from folks of color and non-Christian folks, by filling out the listener survey on our podcast page at surj dot org. And give us a "like" or rate us on iTunes, Spotify, or wherever you listen to our podcast.

You can find out more about SURJ at surj dot org, and our podcast lives on Soundcloud; search on "The Word Is Resistance." Transcripts are available as well on our website, which include references, resources, and action links. We'll be back next week with a resistance Word from Sharon Fennema. I want to thank April Rosenblum deeply for our initial conversation and for

her thoughts as I worked on this episode. And finally, a huge thanks to our sound editor, Claire Hitchins!

(Words of blessing/encouragement)

- Blessings to you in all that you do to resist injustice, and in all that you do to build up a new world.
- Love and liberation, beloveds. Love and liberation.
- Until next time. I'm Rev. Anne Dunlap.

<<Verse 3 of "Building Up A New World, Verse 1 repeated.>>  
<<"Rise, Shine, Give God glory, Children of the Light"  
*We are building up a new world, builders must be strong.*>>

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RESOURCES:

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REFERENCES:

\*Why do I say "currently called" Buffalo, NY? Indigenous scholar Damien Lee: "When I write, I avoid the phrase '...in what is now Canada.' I use '...in what is currently Canada' to open possibilities for imagining futurities beyond the settler state." [Check out this post for more.](#)

*The Jewish Annotated New Testament, NRSV.* 2nd Ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, editors. Oxford University Press, 2017. Check all the amazing essays in the back!

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