

Luke 13:31-35

Run Jesus Run! Herod wants to kill you.

Fear...the great motivator! Some fears can be imagined and some fears can be very real!

In the Old Testament today Abram is still working out his relationship with God. This is the early stages of their relationship and like all relationships there are bound to be some trust issues here.

Like I've said before...There is no such word for Faith in Hebrew...the gods in the ancient world were a given, so the word Aman, which we translate as faith, meant to be able to trust or to rely on. And here we see God taking Abram from his smaller world view to a significantly larger one ...Abram's eternal potential. God tells him to try and count the stars...God shows Abram God's perspective – the eternal now!

...and then using the ancient rituals of sacrifice he comes into covenant with Abram...sealing their relationship in ancient traditions...one which Abram would have understood and trusted!

In Paul's letter to the church in Philippi, a Roman settlement...Paul is urging them to also set their sights not on earthly things but on heavenly things...to look beyond their persecution and the ways of earthly power...he is also focusing them into the larger perspective...the Eternal now.

Paul's point is that we must be heavenly minded if we are to be of any earthly good. Looking into the heavens causes one to gain a greater sense of perspective... and in today's Gospel, Jesus is also putting things into perspective for us.

I wonder what kinda courage it would take for a defenseless mother to stand up to some very real earthly dangers and to shield her own offspring with her own body...sacrificing herself for her children!

So now we have Jesus heading towards Jerusalem... a place that did a lot of professing all about God but actually only trusted in themselves and in their own power. In fact they saw messengers of God as threats to their way of life ...their status quo.

Throughout the Scriptures Jesus is not manipulated by fear or threats...in fact he calls Herod a fox which is dual layered...the fox was of real harm to a hen but it was also a Hebrew insult which anyone hearing this would have picked up on.

Herod Antipas was a bully and a manipulator...mmmm! I don't know anyone like that in today's world... He held onto his power through money and opulence, and he would use violence to keep what he saw as his entitlements. Contrast that to Jesus' endeavors which focused on simple human connections, disarmingly simple, freely given, and liberating.

Jesus says that He is the hen and Herod's the fox...The proverbial fox in the hen house. Herod creates mistrust and fear...betrayal and confusion. The chicks then can become confused and Jesus wishes to gather Jerusalem as a hen gathers her brood under her wings. This is also a reference to how God refers to Godself in the Old Testament...also a hen who gathers her reluctant brood under her wings.

The simple hen when defending her chicks will selflessly defend her little ones who are even more defenseless than she is...and are totally unaware of the danger they may be in... She has no defenses against the fox except for her courage and tenacity of commitment. She does not run from her fear.

I am not a mother myself, but if my mother is any example, it never ends. A mom willingly puts themselves in harm's way to protect their children no matter how old they are. A mother will expose herself to all kinds of dangers to ensure that her children are safe.

And so it is that Jesus today compares himself to a mother hen who will do whatever it takes to protect those baby chicks from the fox. Even to the point of giving it's own life in the hope that they may be spared.

The hen is no match for the fox. And yet that is the way of Jesus, isn't it? He points to and demonstrates the way of love and sacrifice over power and domination...Love and courage over fear... A willingness to stand up even in the face of violence to protect the helpless.

So Jesus chooses the self-sacrificing, chicken as His model. And you and I are those little chicks who seem hellbent on ignoring the efforts of the one who would save us from all that would threaten us.

And that is where the image finally comes to roost. We enter this story as that brood of chicks who are scattered, distracted, unable somehow to comprehend the very real danger which is in our midst.

Jesus' lament over Jerusalem is also for us ...we too often refuse the gifts of God so freely given to us...even if all we have to do is just stand still under God's wing.

So we gather in this season of Lent, knowing full well our need for repentance and to stay focused on God. And it would appear that our primary sin is what it has always been: our unwillingness to trust and stand still in the presence of God: to simply submit and receive God's grace!

It shouldn't be this hard, and yet it seems we are always prone to think that we are enough, we know better, we can do better on our own...what do we need God for?

And now for the Fox...Why call Herod a "fox"?

Herod the Great had 4 kids...Herod Antipas was a tetrarch meaning he had a fourth of Jerusalem... he shared the kingdom with His two brothers and his sister. The Galilee region was under his purview.

What do we know about him? Not much really...Jesus calls him “that fox,” he is not saying that he is as sly as a fox... Jesus here is actually insulting him...a fox is an unclean animal in the Israelite holiness codes.

The Hebrew use of “fox” is almost always derogatory and refers to someone who is second rate or insignificant. Lions and foxes were often contrasted with each other to represent the differences between great men and inferior men. In fact Herod Antipas called his city Tiberius sucking up to the current Ceaser.

When Jesus calls Herod a fox...he is also discounting him as insignificant... Hey go tell Herod I’ve got work to do. Jesus was implying that Herod was really insignificant in the bigger picture here.

Herod Antipas is no lion...Jesus cuts Herod down to size and at the same time shows that in an earthly way He is also willing to sacrifice himself against any predator for us - God’s children.

Barbara Brown Taylor wonders why Jesus chose a hen as an image of his protective care, and not a creature more powerful like the lion of Judah when comparing himself to a fox?

But a hen is what Jesus chooses... which if you think about it is pretty much Jesus’ M.O.

He’s always turning things upside down, so that children and peasants wind up on top, while kings and scholars wind up on the bottom. The first become the last sort of thing...Jesus always pokes holes at our expectations of how we think the world should work.

So of course He chooses a chicken, which is about as far from a fox as you can get. So you can choose to live by licking your chops... or you can choose to die protecting the helpless.

The image of God as hen lays bare God's vulnerability. When you are the mother hen, all you can do is open your wings wide and gather as many of your children as you can...but you can't make the chicks come into safety no matter how open the invitation.

Thus, Taylor goes on to write,

“Jesus won't be king of the jungle in this or any other story.” That's not Jesus' posture is it!

What Jesus will be is someone who stands between the lowly and those who mean to do them harm. Jesus sports no fangs, or claws, or rippling muscles. Just instead chooses a sacrificial love and willingness to shield God's children with His own body. If the fox wants them, he will have to kill Him first.

Which it turns out is exactly what happens!

Luke's Gospel challenges us to emulate the example of Jesus by living our lives with similar courage and resolve...even in the face of fear...especially in the face of very REAL fears!

Do we need courage? Are we doing anything that could possibly incur the wrath of someone in authority? Most of us would rather shuffle along in the shadows of life. Fear and Apathy run rampant today.

If we are honest, I think we would acknowledge the painful truth, wrapped in an old cliché: If you were on trial for your life and the charge was that you are a Christian – would there be enough evidence to convict you!

One of the great challenges today is the manner in which so many people have more or less compartmentalized and privatized their relationship with God. This is why so many Christians today feel no need to go to church, participate in a Bible study group, or blend themselves into any form of Church or community.

Don't get me wrong...it is important for us to have a personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ, but our faith is deepened only when we are a part of a community...the full-on "Body of Christ" experience in the world today!

Our vital participation in a Church community with shared values (like right here at Holy Family) is the only thing that prevents us from surrendering to the rampant self-indulgence and narcissism that marks contemporary America today.

Do we have any King Herod's in our lives? We should all have at least one adversary... No one lives and speaks up in this world without offending somebody.

The challenge is always to stand up to the King Herod's of this world and to observe what happens when a group of people stand up collectively and refuse to give in to their fears. For example, in the early days of the war in the Ukraine I saw people lying down in the streets in front of tanks using their bodies as shields in order to protect their communities and their families...and today all over the world the hens are spreading their wings.

Speaking up for the truth...speaking up for what's right... and championing integrity is never easy and often extracts a high price from us.

So let us all strive to be people of courage. Let us resist the Herod's and foxes of this world who would seek to silence all opposition. Let us confront wrong wherever we find it, always determined to live as citizens of God's kingdom here and now.

Then look up...always look up... count the stars in the heavens and you will come to realize true power and the eternal now that we are all connected to...today...and more importantly for all eternity.

Your Faithful servant,

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