

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18
Psalm 27
Philippians 3:17-4:
Luke 13: 31-35

The Reverend Laura Palmer
St. Peter's Glenside
March 13th, 202
Year C

Foxes and Hens

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. AMEN.

The image of Jesus as a mother hen, gathering her brood under her wings felt cozy, warm, and snuggly to me for years. It's all there on the surface, and yet, dig a little deeper and there are surprises in store. Who doesn't want to be gathered under the wings of love?

Dig a little deeper and vulnerability, pain, and lamentation lurk. We only fool ourselves if we pretend they don't and Lent is the time when we are called to pay attention, to stop, to repent—which means turn back, or turn away— always an invitation to do deeper.

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, but you were not willing.

Do you hear the deep abandonment in those last five words: "You were not willing?" If you have ever felt estranged or rejected from your children, or those whom you deeply love, the pain in those words are no strangers to you. Debie Thomas in *Journey with Jesus* this week writes:

Luke's gospel invites us to contemplate Jesus as mother hen whose chicks don't want her. Though she stands with her wings wide open, offering welcome, belonging, and shelter, her children refuse to come home. Her wings—her arms—are empty. A mother in mourning. A mother struggling with failure and futility.

Fathers struggle with this, too. A priest friend's son did time in prison for crimes he committed while addicted. He had been in/out of rehab and often furious with those who tried to help him. But my friend never gave up. Like Jesus, the mother hen, who called out to her own, my friend's love was rejected and he felt abandoned. And yet... he wrote a lengthy letter to his son every week during which communication was allowed... some 30 letters during his incarceration. His son didn't write back, but he did read his father's letters which focused on the 12 steps to the other inmates. I wish I could say his son got his life back on track after he was released but the roller coaster ride continues as it has for years.

But the unconditional love his father offered in his letters is what Jesus offers us. Unwavering. Steadfast. Even when we reject it. It is always there, like a lighthouse beacon, showing the way home.

There is nothing cozy about that love. It's fierce. It doesn't take the danger out of the world and there is no real safety under the chicken's wings. "Chicken" is the word we use to mock people who are scared. To mock and taunt those who are weak.

Chickens can't fly, can't run very fast, and are no match for a fox that wants to snack on its chicks. Most of us would choose the King of the jungle over the Queen of the coop as our protector any day.

But a mother hen will stand between a predator and her chicks. There will be blood and feathers everywhere after the fox attacks.

Jesus was weak in comparison to Herod, whom he refers to as "a fox" *a few verses earlier in Luke*. Herod, the cruel and brutal emperor who would soon condemn Jesus to death on the cross because he perceived him as a threat to his rule.

Foxes usually win in this world. It certainly looked that way on Good Friday.

As we witness the massive bombardment of Ukraine, targeting civilians, apartment buildings, hospitals and escape corridors it's hard not to see Vladimir Putin as the fox; a cruel dictator hellbent on bending Ukraine to his will.

But the will of the Ukrainian people has proved so far to be unbreakable as has its leader, President Zelensky's who is willing to stand between his people and Putin's empire even if it costs him his life. I'm not suggesting that he's a mother hen to Putin's fox, but he has shown the world how courage can conquer fear when it's based in love.

In a few weeks we'll remember the cheering crowds that walked with Jesus into Jerusalem as he rode towards Herod on donkey—hardly a chariot of war—with his motley crew of disciples.

We'll sing, "Ride on Ride on in Majesty, ride on, ride on, prepared to die." The organ will make it sound glorious. But we delude ourselves.

Jesus was standing up to Herod's empire with an alternative vision of the world. But in no way did Jesus reduce the danger in a world based on oppression, injustice, domination, and violence.

2,000 years later, the choice is still in so many ways, the same. The crowds that cheered Jesus on his way to Jerusalem were jeering him a week later. The love of a Mother Hen suddenly didn't feel like she offered very much at all in terms of protection. Jesus never promised a free pass from the fear and danger in this life. He offered us love.

Writes Lutheran pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber:

I started to think that maybe it's not *safety* that keeps us from being afraid. Maybe it's love. Which means that a Mother Hen of God doesn't keep foxes from being dangerous...a Mother Hen of God keeps foxes from being what determines how we experience the unbelievable gift of being alive.

The paradox of Lent is that in this time of turning away, turning inward, and examining ourselves through sacrifice and repentance, we are drawing closer to the unbelievable gift of being alive in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ, not despite the pain of this world, but because of it. AMEN

Nadia Bolz-Weber, "The Corners," March 19, 2020