

The Hen and the Fox

Lent IIC – March 4, 2007

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

Loving God, Help us to recognize and to know you as one who loves us like a mother hen. As one who places themselves between us and danger. As one who will give up their own life, in order that we might be saved. Amen.

The gospel today presents us with an intriguing contrast. A fox and a hen. Barbara Taylor Brown puts a delightful spin on the contrast: *You can either live by licking your chops or die by protecting your chicks*¹ The fox that licks its chops. The hen that protects its chicks.

This is an especially appropriate scripture for Lent. Luke points us, as Luke always does, to Jerusalem and to the Cross. Towards Good Friday and Easter.

We are told that a certain group of Pharisees come to see Jesus. Acting almost like the sheriff in a spaghetti

western, they tell Jesus that he needs to get out of town. Herod is out to kill him. But Jesus is neither impressed nor deterred by Herod. Jesus is, in fact, leaving Herod's territory. But not because of the Pharisee's warning, nor because he is afraid of Herod. Jesus is leaving the Galilee, the countryside that is governed by Herod, because Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem.

Jesus replies to the Pharisees with notification that he plans to continue the work that God has given him to do. Jesus isn't afraid that Herod will succeed in killing him. Because Herod is not in Jerusalem. And it is to Jerusalem, the city that kills prophets and stones those sent to her, that Jesus must go.

Jesus went to Jerusalem voluntarily. And he knew that he would die there. That seems clear from the testimony of scripture. It also clear that he avoided death until he could get to Jerusalem.

The people in his hometown wanted to throw him off a cliff, and he avoided that.

Jesus could have drowned in the Sea of Galilee at least twice that we know of, and he avoided that.

He could have stormed the gates of Herod's palace when he cousin John was in prison and eventually executed. That probably would have gotten him killed.

Or based on today's lesson, Jesus could have turned himself in, but he avoided that. As Luke tells his story, Jesus has one end in view. And that requires that he get to Jerusalem. Jesus has to get to Jerusalem because it is in Jerusalem, that Jesus has to die.

It is in Jerusalem, on the cross, that all of the things that can destroy us, and that which can save us, are brought together.

Sin, corruption, brutal power, despair, pain, torture, murder, death. All the things that destroy.

In addition to those things that destroy, that which can save is also brought to the cross – love.

It is that love which over flows in abundance between the persons and within the life of the Trinity. It is that love that actuates God's will, that love that actuates the obedience of Jesus, and the that love that actuates the power of the Holy Spirit.

It was out of this love that creation came to be. It was out of this love that 'again and again (God) called us to return'² to a right relationship. It was out of this love that we are challenged to 'love our neighbors as ourselves'³ (Matt 22:39).

That love could do nothing but obediently preach freedom to the captive and the oppressed, that love that could do nothing but give blessing to the poor, the grief-torn, the persecuted, and that love

that could do nothing but heal the disabled person.

It is on the cross, in Jerusalem, that all of the things that can destroy, and that which can save, are brought together. And when they came together, there was only one possible outcome.

But that's a story that has an ending that we'll get to in a few weeks. Keep coming back!

For right now, we are on a journey with Jesus towards Jerusalem. He's not being pushed there by Herod. He's going there on his own steam.

There are still a few more lessons for us to learn along the way. For today, we're given the image of Herod, the fox. A fox lickin' his chops. A fox who thinks he has it all figured out.

And we're given a second image. That of Jesus, in the role of a mother hen. No tricks or tools to out-fox the powers to be. Just willing to die in order to protect her chicks.

And that's just enough.

¹ Barbara Brown Taylor. As a Hen Gathers Her Brood. *The Christian Century*, February 25, 1986, page 201

² *Book of Common Prayer* Eucharistic Prayer D, Rite II, page 370

³ Matthew 22:39