

## *A Fox in the Henhouse*

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Luke 13: 31-35

2nd Sunday in Lent 2-28-2010

First Presbyterian Church  
Uvalde, TX

Whether you realized it or not, we all have particular lenses through which we read Scripture. We all bring our own life experiences, biases and ways of being in the world as we read biblical texts. Sometimes I notice my lens while I am reading and sometimes I don't. Today's reading from Luke just jumped out at me as I read this passage through the lens of a mother's eyes.

I could not help but think of my own children and all mother-child relationships in general as I read today's lectionary reading. As a mother, I can just begin to picture Jesus' torment and frustration as he lamented over his children.

I can picture myself saying to my daughter when she was a teenager, "If you will just listen to me, and learn from the mistakes I have already made, life will be so much easier!" And what is the common response from a teenaged daughter—a roll of the eyes or an over-emphasized sigh.

Our teenaged sons and daughters don't like to listen to us, and Jerusalem didn't want to listen to Jesus either.

So, how do we as parents deal with our wayward, rebellious children? We cry, we fret, we worry, we pray, and at the end of the day we must realize that we really are powerless over them. That's not a comfortable place to be, yet that—on a very small scale, is how I think Jesus must've been feeling that day about Jerusalem.

Barbara Brown Taylor has such an eloquent way with words. She explains it this way, "If you have ever loved someone you could not protect, then you understand the depth of Jesus' lament. All you can do is open your arms. You cannot make anyone walk into them.

Meanwhile, this is the most vulnerable posture in the world—wings spread, breast exposed—but if you mean what you say, then this is how you stand.

...Jesus won't be king of the jungle in this or any other story. What he will be is a mother hen, who stands between the chicks and those who mean to do them harm. She has no fangs, no claws, no rippling muscles. All she has is her willingness to shield her babies with her own body. If the fox wants them, he will have to kill her first; which he does, as it turns out. He slides up on her one night in the yard while all the babies are asleep. When her cry wakens them, they scatter.

She dies the next day where both foxes and chickens can see her—wings spread, breast exposed—without a single chick beneath her feathers. It breaks her heart . . .but if you mean what you say, then this is how you stand" (Barbara Brown Taylor, *Christian Century*, 2/25/86).

That is exactly what Jesus meant, and that is the way he stood—arms outstretched, breast exposed—and that is the way he died for us.

I heard a story a long time ago about a farmyard fire. It was after a fire has destroyed this whole farm, the barn and stables, all the fences, everything. As the owners were walking around, assessing the damage, they came across a dead hen. She was scorched and blackened,

with no life left in her, yet they could sense some movement under her wings. As they gently lifted up the dead hen, they found a whole brood of baby chicks—and they were quite alive! The mama hen had gathered all her chicks under her wings to protect them. She had literally given up her life for her chicks.

That is the same thing Jesus wanted to do for Jerusalem. Jesus could see that fire coming and tried to gather his children under his wing to protect them, but they would have none of it. They continued to rebel against God, to kill the prophets sent by God, and to ignore the very one who could save them. And like a mother crying for her own child who will not listen, all he can do is love them. All he can do is open his arms to welcome them into his embrace. He cannot force them to come. And Jesus realizes he must move on toward what he knows his fate to be, toward the plan his Father has already laid out.

That is the same thing Jesus wants to do for us today, and we, just like Jerusalem, just like our teenage children, roll our eyes, give a big sigh and think we can handle life on our own, thank you very much. And all Jesus can do is open his outstretched arms to welcome us home—whether we chose to enter into that embrace or not.

To me, this is one of the biggest paradoxes of the human life. We call ourselves Christians—Christians whom I know long to be nurtured, sheltered and protected as chicks under God’s wings, yet we strive so hard to escape that very comforting, safe place, opting to live life on our own. Strange, very strange.

I can hear Jesus speaking to us today, using many of the same words Luke has him speaking in this gospel: “People, people, how often I have desired to gather you under my wings like a hen gathers her brood. How often I have wanted to protect you, but you wouldn’t have anything to do with me! How often I love you with a dying love, and you ignore me!”

Why is it that we have such a difficult time accepting the grace and love of Jesus? The season of Lent presents uncomfortable questions and hard truths to us, and this is one of those times. This is not a feel good; get a warm-fuzzy kind of sermon today. This is a sermon that calls us to take a serious look at our lives and the way in which we live. It calls us to look deep within ourselves and examine ourselves as to why so many times in our lives we do reject Jesus. Why are we lured by the soft purring of that old fox? Why do we do wander away from the henhouse some days and try to live life on our own—outside our community of faith and outside of God’s protection?

We are the body of Christ together—not as individual little chicks running around by ourselves—but together, we are the Body of Christ.

Christ—our mother hen—still has her wings stretched out. Our mother hen still yearns and longs for us to come into her embrace.

On Ash Wednesday, we were reminded that from dust we came, and to dust we shall return. We were reminded that it is our own sinfulness that creates that gaping hole between God and us. We are called to repentance—to turn around and come back home to the henhouse. We hear that again and again in this text.

It would be a lot easier to believe from this reading that Jesus was attacking Herod, and his lament was for him, but it wasn’t. Jesus did call him a fox, all right, but he was talking to the faithful—those who had a love for God.

It *would* be easier if Jesus had spent his last few days of his life attacking Herod, but he didn’t. His lament was for us. “His great lament, toward the end of his earthly ministry, as he

faces the cross, is for God's people, the faithful who are unfaithful, Israel, the church, for us" (William Willamon, "Jesus Weeps for Us," *Pulpit Resource*, Feb. 28, 2010).

That is one reason, we should be supremely grateful that during this hour of worship, we were given the opportunity to confess our sins together. You see, Jesus not only judges us, and weeps for us, but Jesus forgives us. Jesus Christ did not go to the cross condemning us, but rather with these words, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Let's not live in the darkness any more. Let's continue our processes of turning our lives around and over to Jesus Christ.

Have you heard that old story before about the couple that had been married for years and years? They were in the car going somewhere and the man was driving, because that's just the way it always was—he always drove. The wife looked over at her husband and wistfully said to him, "remember when we were dating and we couldn't stand to be apart? We would even sit snuggled up next to you on the seat, remember?" The husband then grinned and turned and looked at his wife, "I haven't moved," he said.

My friends, Christ hasn't moved either. Christ is still there with arms outstretched, waiting to gather us in under his wings. We simply must turn around and meet him.

Let us pray:

Loving God, on this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent, give us the courage to allow ourselves to be gathered in by you. May we feel the soft embrace of your love for us as we struggle to be chicks in a world of foxes.