

Lent 2C, 2010

Text: Luke 13:31-35

Title: The Fox and the Hen

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Today we have the fox and the hen.

Herod is the fox, and Jesus is the hen.

According to the Pharisees, Herod is trying to kill Jesus. Now it could be that the Pharisees are making up a story to scare Jesus off themselves, but chances are that if the Pharisees were lying, then Jesus would know it, and He would call them on it. So it very well could be the case that Herod is trying to kill Jesus.

This is Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great. This Herod has already killed John the Baptist and made his head into a birthday present. It's likely that he feels threatened by Jesus, too, and wants to do away with him.

So Jesus calls Herod a fox.

Foxes are sneaky and sly. Even the ancient folks knew this. Foxes are small. They're not like wolves or lions or bears, so they must be crafty to get their meals. The fox does not rely on brute strength, but on a combination of cunning and viciousness. The fox must be sneaky.

Herod is like a fox. Herod does not have much power. He's not a king. He's not very strong in terms of military might. He's only in charge of the small district of Galilee. Galilee is the backwater towns full of country bumpkins, not that important or prestigious.

Herod must cooperate with Rome to stay in power. So Herod relies on his political skill and savvy to be able to rule to Jewish people of Galilee and keep the Romans happy. He's a sneaky, cunning fox. And now he has his sights set on Jesus. Jesus could ruin everything by gathering a large enough following to threaten Herod's power, or the Romans could get mad at Herod for not keeping Jesus under control. So Herod the fox must get rid of Jesus.

But Jesus won't let Herod dictate His itinerary. He's going to stick to His routine- cast out demons, heal the sick, and then finish the job in Jerusalem. Even if Herod is out to kill Him, Jesus just keeps going.

Last week it was the devil who tried to tell Jesus what to do. He tried to get Jesus to break His fast, to bow down and worship him, and to test God's love for Him. But three times Jesus said, "No." He was not going to let the devil run the show.

This week the Pharisees and Herod are trying to set Jesus' agenda. Once again, Jesus is running the show. He won't be fooled by the fox. He's not going to change what He's doing just because Herod, the fox, is out to get Him.

So Herod is the fox.

Jesus, on the other hand, is the hen.

Now hens are not the smartest birds. If someone compares you to a chicken, it's probably not a good thing. Just look at our story of Chicken Little. In Chicken Little, it's better to be the fox than the hen. Chicken Little is not very bright, and she is outsmarted by the fox in the end.

Jesus does things that many folks would consider not so bright. Jesus goes to Jerusalem knowing that He will die there. It's foolish. It doesn't make sense. Would you go somewhere, knowing that the people there were waiting to kill you, and that they would succeed in doing so? Probably not. Chances are you'd head in the opposite direction, and do everything you could to save your life.

But not Jesus. Jesus keeps going to Jerusalem, knowing that it's a graveyard for prophets.

Jesus doesn't go blindly. Jesus is not surprised by anything that happens in Jerusalem. Jesus knows that He will die there.

But Jesus goes there for a reason. He goes to gather His children, the way that a mother hen would gather her chicks.

Even if you've never set foot on a farm, you can picture this in your mind. Danger is near, an enemy, a predator approaches, and so the mother hen runs frantically around the yard, trying to gather in all of her chicks. She gathers them under her wings to protect them. She boldly faces the predator, shielding her chicks with her body, knowing that he will have to kill her first if he's going to get to them.

Jesus comes to us not as a fox, but as a hen. He doesn't come to trick us and deceive us. He doesn't come to destroy or devour us. He doesn't come in force or violence, but He comes with kindness and gentleness.

Jesus doesn't force you. If you don't want to come along, He won't make you. God's grace is resistible. You can always say, "No."

Jesus doesn't trap you. He doesn't make promises He can't keep, or lure you in with tricks. Jesus is upfront and honest about who He is and what it means to be a disciple. You will lose your life, but find it in Him.

Jesus wants you as His own, but He won't force you and He won't trick you. He's not going to lie to you and deceive you.

It's strange to wrap your head around it, but God doesn't always get what He wants. God doesn't always get what He wants. God wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. Jesus wants to gather Jerusalem the way that a hen gathers her chicks.

But Jerusalem does not want to be gathered. Jerusalem rejected Jesus. Even though Jerusalem welcomed Jesus with palms and hosannas, and the words, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord," by the end of the week the city had turned against him.

Sometimes they strew His way,
And His sweet praises sing;
Resounding all the day
Hosannas to their King:
Then "Crucify!" is all their breath,
And for His death they thirst and cry.

Jesus loves His people. He loves them so much that He lets them reject Him. If you force someone to love you, then it's not really love. If you can't say, "no", it's not really love. Jesus loves us first. But He lets you reject His love. He lets you say no to His love. If you only belonged to Jesus because He made you love Him, that would not be true love.

Love is foolish. Love allows itself to be rejected. Sometimes we wonder why God does things this way. Why doesn't God just make everyone love Him? Why doesn't He just make everyone a Christian? Why doesn't He just make everyone behave and obey and love one another?

That would be the fox way of doing things. Instead, Jesus loves you the hen way. No tricks, no force, no compulsion. You can always choose to run away. It breaks Jesus' heart, but He loves you so much that He lets you go.

Sometimes we're tempted to do church the fox way- to come up with gimmicks and tricks and manipulate folks just to get them to join the church. There's always the temptation to try the old bait and switch, and attract people with things that are flashy but are not the gospel.

The gospel way is not the fox way. The gospel way is the hen way. We do church the hen way. God uses us to gather people together, to draw them back to Him the way that a hen gathers her chicks.

Some people will say, "No, I'm okay on my own," and refuse your invitation. It's a sad thing, and it's okay to shed a few tears. But you should not be surprised. People even said "no" to Jesus Christ Himself. He wanted to gather them together, but they would not.

And just as Jesus predicted, He died there in Jerusalem. He stretched out His wings to shield His chicks from harm, and He bore the full brunt of the enemies attacks. Jesus died to protect His children from sin, death, and the devil.

And that's how you live, as a chick gathered into your mother's arms. You are safe under the shadow of His wings, living enfolded by the arms that were stretched out on the cross for you.

Jesus comes to you, not as a fox to outwit you and outsmart you, to trick you into submitting to His will.

No, Jesus comes to you as a mother hen, who loves her chicks, and will do anything to shield them and protect them from harm. Jesus gave His life for you, and He continues to shield you and protect you.

Even when your own death draws near, you'll still be safe within His arms. Not even death can separate you from Jesus' love for you. He gave His life protecting and defending you from harm.