

Lent 2C, 2013

Text: Luke 13:31-35

Title: Fox or Hen

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Would you rather be a fox or a chicken? If you had your choice, which would you choose? The fox or the chicken?

The fox is the natural choice. Foxes are small but vicious. They are smart and cunning.

Sly as a fox is a good thing, and you don't want to be outfoxed. Who wants to be called a chicken? When you get the two together, when you have a fox in the hen house, it usually doesn't turn out well for the chickens.

Both of these animals, the fox and the hen, show up in our gospel lesson today. Herod is the fox and Jesus is the hen.

This Herod is Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great. This is the Herod who married Herodias, his brother's wife. This is the Herod who imprisoned John the Baptist and had him beheaded. He's vicious as a fox, and he's used to having things his way.

Even the Pharisees, Jesus' enemies, are warning him that Herod is out to get Him. As much as they disagree with Jesus, they don't want to see Him killed, at least not yet.

Jesus' response to the Pharisees sound a little odd. Jesus says, "Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem."

Jesus is saying, "Tell Herod, 'I'm not afraid of you. I'm going to keep doing what I'm doing, whether you like it or not. Right now I'm busy healing and casting out demons, but my journey, my life is near the end. I'm making my way to Jerusalem, and there I will die.'"

So first, Jesus talks about what He's doing right now. Now He is healing and casting out demons. Now He is helping to poor and the weak and the dying. That's what He's doing now.

But on the third day, meaning soon, but not right away, He will finish His course. This word, "finish" is the same word Jesus speaks from the cross when He says, "It is finished."

All the good stuff Jesus did while He was alive was great. People were very thankful for the help He gave them. But that wasn't the main reason He had come. That was not His true purpose.

The main thing Jesus came to do was to die. Sometimes we lose sight of that. We like the Jesus who teaches and preaches, who heals and blesses, and we forget that the whole reason He came was to die for us.

Those miracles only healed a few. But through His death on the cross, Jesus brings salvation to all people. He dies for the sins of the world.

Jesus is willing to die. He knows His time on earth is short. And nothing will stop Him from going to Jerusalem and dying there.

Jerusalem was the capital of Israel in more ways than one.

It was the political capital. There David had reigned as King, as well as Solomon, his son, and many generations after him. It was still the political capital, the seat of power even now that the Romans are in charge.

Jerusalem was the commercial capital. People came there to trade, to buy and to sell. It was the largest city in the land.

But most importantly, Jerusalem was the spiritual capital. The temple was there. The high priest was there. It was the holy city. When people wanted to meet with God, to pray and to offer gifts, they went to Jerusalem.

The folks in Jerusalem weren't too kind to prophets. They weren't always ready to listen to what God had to say through them. And some prophets they even killed.

We heard about Jeremiah and his problems with the people of Jerusalem. They cared more about their city than they cared about listening to the Lord and taking His word to heart.

We're not too different from the people of Jerusalem. We don't always like it when people speak to us on God's behalf, especially when they tell us to repent, that what we are doing is wrong and that we need to change our behavior.

We're not likely to kill a prophet, but if a pastor says things we don't like, we might make life miserable for him and try to get him to leave. If that doesn't work, we can always look for a new church or a new pastor who tells us what we want to hear.

But these are the people that Jesus goes to see in Jerusalem. These are the people, the very people who will kill Him, that He longs to gather together like a mother hen gathering her chicks.

Jesus doesn't come to Jerusalem like a fox, to kill and destroy. He could come to punish these people. He could come in wrath and anger. He could come in power and might like Herod and so many other earthly kings.

But Jesus comes not as a fox, but as a hen.

See, these are his people. No matter what they do or say to Him, they are His children. And He loves them. He wants nothing more than to gather them together, to shelter them under His wings.

Why does a hen gather her chicks under her wings? She doesn't do it to nurse them, she does it to protect them. When danger threatens, that's when the mother hen covers her children, she puts her body between the chicks and her enemies, so that the only way they can get to her chicks is through her.

The story is told of a firefighter who was walking through a recently burned out forest. And he came across a dead, charred bird there on the forest floor. This was something he rarely saw. Most of the time birds could easily escape forest fires. They can fly away and stay out of reach of the flames. He leaned over to take a closer look, thinking that maybe the bird had been injured or sick. He kicked the bird over with his boot, and four little birds that had been huddling underneath their mother sprung to life and scurried away into the forest.

That mother bird had died protecting her children. She could have easily flown away. But yet she lay there on top of them as the flames covered her body, protecting her brood.

We see this in acts of heroism around us today. The teacher in Connecticut who put herself between her students and the bullets. The soldier who throws himself on a grenade to shield his comrades.

These are pictures of what Jesus did for you in Jerusalem. He placed His body between you and the enemy. He took the full brunt of Satan's attack Himself. He spread wide His arms to shield and shelter you.

That is where you find safety now, underneath the holy arms of Jesus. He offers you protection from Satan and from eternal death, He reaches out to gather you in.

But there are some who would not accept Jesus, some who turned away from Him, some who would rather face Satan and death on their own.

Jesus says, "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"

Jesus doesn't force anyone. If you want to stay outside of His wings when the foxes come, when the fire rages, when the bullets fly, that's your choice. But it will be the end of you.

Jesus says, "[Y]ou will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'" That was the song sung by the pilgrims of Jerusalem when Jesus came riding on a donkey on Palm Sunday. "Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

That will be our song, too, in just a moment. We, too, will sing, “Holy, holy, Lord, God of pow’r and might, Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna. Hosanna. Hosanna in the highest, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Just as Jesus came into Jerusalem, so He comes here today. None of the foxes of this world can stop Him. He comes today to gather you together, to shelter and protect you with His own body, given unto death for you.