

Luke 13:31 - 35

At that very hour some Pharisees came, and said to him (Jesus), "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."

And he said to them, "Go and tell that fox, '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.'

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'" (Luke 13:31-35)

Jesus has just "set his face towards Jerusalem" in Luke 9:51 Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem, where he will be arrested and condemned. I like that expression "sets his face". I have an image of a steely determined single minded purpose. (What is that song we used to sing, "No turning back, no turning back"). Resilience is a much underrated quality. May we grow it in our young people. And faith is the other quality Jesus is manifesting in this passage. And maybe the thing we have to say about faith is while it gives a person purpose, direction, meaning – but gee it makes their lives a whole lot more complicated, vulnerable, dangerous. Faith does that.

It is not a happy-clappy optimism that denies suffering, but a face set like flint towards Jerusalem and all its painful paradoxes; a steadfastness born of grief and lament; a trudging sort of hope that in practice is often nothing more than putting one aching foot in front of the other.

Sometimes living in faith looks like nothing but hanging in there by your shredded and bloodied fingernails. And that is faith, when to not live by faith may have meant you letting go and plummeting down the ravine. And that is faith for that moment in your life. Sometimes living in faith looks like the defiant, focussed, outrage that Jesus displays today. Protective, belligerent, uncowed yet ultimately knowing the short term victory may well never come in your time.

The only way faith can be defeated is by being diverted. Shunted up a side track and growing self focussed. But faith knows it is building for a grander and more lofty day.

But along the way to Jerusalem and his date with destiny Jesus stops to teach, to heal or to sit with those who love him. Today's text finds him confronted by Pharisees who warn him to move on quickly because the fox is at the gate -- Herod Antipas is after him. In their hearing he lays out his plans: "I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work." I'm on my way to Jerusalem, he says. It's the end of the road for me. What do you reckon was behind these Pharisees as they warn Jesus to get out of town because Herod Antipas wants to kill him.

Herod had previously imprisoned and then beheaded Jesus' cousin John the Baptist. So Herod represented very real, actual danger.

Which is why I love Jesus' reaction. Because Jesus was the embodiment of *be not afraid*.... The Bible favourite expression - appearing over 100 times...he was like, "Oh Herod wants to kill me? Well, tell that fox that I'm like... busy! Oh and I am not afraid of you."

The fox is prowling, slinking around, circling the hen. Jesus calls Herod a fox - Herod was the puppet ruler, a notoriously cruel and ruthless despot, and then rather bizarrely refers to himself in the role, in the persona, of a mother hen gathering her chicks to herself to offer them protection, no doubt we are meant to picture her laying her body on the line, literally, if required. when the fox strikes. As indeed the fate that befalls Jesus.

Jesus is not accusing Jerusalem. He is lamenting Jerusalem. When he finally sees Jerusalem, Luke tells us, "He wept over it" (Luke 19:41). He is sorrowing and protesting the end, the death, the narrowness and shortsightedness, of Jerusalem. And yet, he continues coming to Jerusalem. He is always coming to the Jerusalem of our lives, always calling us to life, to more life, to new life. The promise never goes away, even when we do not respond.

But by here describing himself as a hen Jesus is doing something new.

We are used to God as King, God as a warrior, a rock, strong foundation... The Bible is full of metaphors that compare God to an animal, but they are all fierce, wild animals: lions and leopards and bears. Even when the psalms and the prophets speak of people taking refuge under God's wings, the wings are those of an eagle, not a hen. And yet here Jesus compares himself to a homely, vulnerable, humble, mother hen. I like to think of the young boy Jesus out in the village and watching hens in the dusty roads. He must have noticed and been impressed with a hen gathering her chicks one day, or maybe over many days.

We had hens at our place when I was growing up. Regularly around 8 or so in the shed my Dad had constructed in the back yard. I have vivid memories of standing both transfixed and appalled when Dad would dispatch one with a swift dropping of the axe upon the chooks neck held on an old tree stump. Macabre fascination for a 9 year old boy. And every couple of years Dad would buy some cute little fluffy chicks who would run scurrying over the floor of the chook pen until something would alarm them and they would run under the hen and you could not believe all these chicks had disappeared before your eyes. Not so much the mother gathering them to herself as the chicks running to her protection. Unlike what Jesus says in today's reading where it is Jesus himself as the mother hen figure who has longed to gather the people of Jerusalem to himself but they would not have any part of that.

Nadia Bolz-Weber puts it - A Mother Hen of a God doesn't keep foxes from being dangerous . . . a Mother Hen of a God keeps foxes from being what determines how we experience the unbelievably beautiful gift of being alive.

God the Mother Hen gathers all of her downy feathered, vulnerable little ones under God's protective wings so that we know where we belong, because it is there that we find warmth and shelter.

But Faith in God does not bring you safety.

The fox still exists.

Danger still exists.

And by that I mean, danger is not optional, but fear is.

Because maybe the opposite of fear isn't bravery. Maybe the opposite of fear is love. So in the response to our own Herods, in response to the very real dangers of this world we have an invitation as people of faith: which is to respond by loving.

"I say to you this afternoon that I would rather die on the highway of Alabama than make a butchery of my conscience. I say to you, when we march, don't panic and remember that we must remain true to nonviolence. I'm asking everybody in the line, if you can't be nonviolent, don't get in here. If you can't accept blows without retaliating don't get in the line. If you can accept it out of your commitment to nonviolence, you will somehow do something for this nation that may well save it. If you can accept it, you will leave those state trooper bloodied with their own barbarities. If you can accept it, you will do something that will transform conditions here in Alabama." (see [chp. 26](#) for more of the story)

His words are full of resolve; they are words spoken by someone who knows the danger and suffering that will come from following that resolve. They are the words of a man who knows that to be *safe* with God does not mean safety in the world. They are spoken by a man who knows Christ and follows his non-violent path to peace and justice.

In a world, still convinced that "power" looks like might in the form of tanks and rockets and weapons of mass destruction – Jesus reminds us that God's kind of power comes in the form of a mother hen's feathered wings that don't stand a chance, really, against the teeth and claws of the fox.

In a world where “strength” looks like aggression and force and violence and bloodshed – Jesus reminds us that sacrificial love is stronger than all of that and that our God is one who sheds blood, too.

In a world – and in this war – where winning might be determined by who can count the most dead bodies, in the end – Jesus reminds us that one dead body matters most, because it will be raised again on the third day – as hope for all the others – when God’s work of resurrection is finished.