

The Fox and the Hen

March 4, 2007

(Lent 2 - Year C)

Luke 13: 22-35

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

In today's reading from the Gospel of Luke, two different animals are mentioned:

A fox and a hen.

In the Gospel passage, some Pharisees come and say to Jesus:

"Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."

Jesus replies back:

"Go and tell that fox for me:

'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day, I finish my work.'"

Here is a side of Jesus that we don't think of very much.

A side of Jesus that has the guts to say about King Herod:

"Go and tell that fox for me:

Listen - I am casting out demons and performing cures."

But then, we see *another* side of Jesus that we rarely think of:

Jesus refers to himself as a mother hen.

In the Gospel passage, Jesus says:

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!

How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"

In today's reading from the Gospel of Luke, two different animals are mentioned:

A fox and a hen.

Jesus calls Herod a fox.

Then, Jesus desires to gather his children together like a mother hen.

Two different animals reveal two rarely discussed aspects of Jesus'

persona:

An in-your-face, gutsy side and a nurturing and, even, maternal side.

Even though my sons are now 16 and 12 years old, I don't forget what it was like to be the father of small children.

I can remember the first night after we brought Scott home from the hospital.

We put him in a bassinet, and put the bassinet next to my side of the bed, so that Susan could get some rest that first night.

I can remember waking up during the night, every few minutes, listening in the darkness for the sound of Scott's breath.

Several times during the night, I got up and tip-toed over to the side of his bassinet.

I put my ear down next to him, waiting, waiting until I heard the sound of his next little breath.

Even though I am a father, not a mother, I know what it is like to desire to gather my children together and to see that they are protected, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.

Last summer, our new Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori, got herself into hot water with some folks.

In her first sermon after being elected as the first female Presiding Bishop, she preached, saying:

“Our mother Jesus gives birth to a new creation.
And you and I are his children.”¹

Some people thought that this concept of Jesus as a nurturing, life-giving mother was a brand-new, even heretical, concept.

But, in Scripture, it is Jesus himself who uses this imagery about himself, this imagery of a mother hen, gathering her children under her wings.

And, one of the great and highly-regarded saints of the Church, Julian of

¹ *Episcopal News Service*, June 21, 2006

Norwich, in the 1300s, over 600 years ago, wrote this:
“[Jesus], the second person of the Trinity, is our Mother in nature in our substantial creation, in whom we are founded and rooted, and he is our Mother of mercy...”²

For, in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus calls Herod a fox, and then says:
“Jerusalem, Jerusalem...

How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.”

If you were to go to the Holy Land today, on the Mount of Olives, just across the Kidron Valley from the city of Jerusalem, is a small chapel.

This small chapel is named Dominus Flevit, which is Latin for:
“The Lord Wept.”

This chapel overlooks the city of Jerusalem, with breathtaking views of the city over which Jesus wept, as Jesus cried out in Luke’s Gospel:

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem!”

In this chapel of Dominus Flevit, on the front of the altar, is a picture. It is a mosaic medallion, depicting a white hen with a golden halo around her head.

Her red comb resembles a crown, and her wings are spread wide to shelter the little, yellow chicks that crowd around her feet.

The hen looks like she is ready to spit fire if anyone comes near her babies.

This mosaic medallion of the white hen and the yellow chicks is encircled with red words in Latin.

Translated into English, these words read:

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!

How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

Jesus is the hen, who looks into the bassinet at all hours of the night, to

² From *Revelations of Divine Love* by Julian of Norwich (1342-c.1417)

make sure his babies are still alive and well.
Jesus is the hen, who is ready to spit fire at any fox who comes near her baby chicks.
Jesus is the hen, who has no fangs, no venom, no deadly defenses.
All the hen has is her willingness to shield her babies with her own body.

If the fox wants her babies, he will have to kill her first.
Which the fox does, as it turns out.³

On the Cross of Calvary, the hen spreads her wings wide and offers her own body, to save her chicks.
For, Jesus is our hen, our protector, our life-giver, our gutsy mother.

And, we are challenged to imitate this Jesus.
We are challenged to be hens, and not foxes, by protecting *all* of God's babies.
We are called to use our ample wings to protect those in our society who are as helpless as tiny, little, yellow chicks.
We are to be both father *and* mother to the children in this world who live in poverty, who are abused, who are uneducated, and who are unprotected by sheltering wings of love.

For, God is both our Father and our Mother:
Listening on tip-toe for each of our whispering breaths.
Gathering us under gentle wings.
Protecting us from the fox.

And, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus looks out over the Kidron Valley at the breathtaking view of Jerusalem.
And, Jesus cries out, to each of us:
“How often have I desired to gather you -
As a hen gathers her brood under her wings,
As a Savior gathers his children under his Cross.”

³ From an article by Barbara Brown Taylor in *The Christian Century*, February 25, 1986.

AMEN.

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