

**The Second Sunday of Lent, Year C, 2022**  
**Luke 13:31-35; Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18**  
**Saint Andrew Lutheran Church**

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Preface to the reading:

In Luke's gospel, the city of Jerusalem has such a significant role that it seems like a character in the story. The narrative begins and ends in Jerusalem and its temple. In chapter 9, Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem where the cross awaited him, and nothing would divert him. His face was set.

Today's story takes place on that journey.  
(Read Luke 13:31-35)

Here's a little poem, written by Walter Crane. It's the classic story of the fox and the hen.

The Hen roosted high on her perch,  
Hungry Fox down below, on the search,  
Coaxed her hard to descend  
She replied, "Most dear friend!  
I feel more secure on my perch."

I suppose it's possible that Jesus heard a children's poem similar to this when he was growing up. Whether that's true or not, I find it interesting that the fox and the hen appear together in this story. I think it's worth our paying attention.

Herod, that fox, had killed John the Baptist. Later, Herod heard reports about what Jesus and the disciples were doing; he also heard that people were saying Jesus could be John...raised from the dead. So, Herod wanted to "see" Jesus.

Now...it could be true that Herod was simply curious to see who this Jesus was and truly wanted just to see him. More likely, though, the Pharisees were right — Herod, that sinister fox, wanted to arrange an opportunity kill Jesus.

In today's story, Jesus positions himself as the hen, smarter than the cunning, old fox. But unlike the hen in the nursery rhyme, this hen won't stay

high on her perch. This hen will come down to protect her chicks. To save them from the tricks of the fox.

A couple of Sundays ago, we heard about Jesus coming back down from the mountain where he had experienced the Transfiguration. It wasn't for him stay up there, safe from the dangers of being human. It was for him to come back down, into the valley of human reality, where he encountered and experienced the suffering and hardship of this broken world.

So, this hen will keep on doing her work of protecting and saving her chicks until that work is complete, even though she risks her own safety. And she does it even though the chicks, oblivious to the danger, don't participate with her.

Which makes me want to give a nod to the Genesis story — it's such a weird story...I can't just let it hang there. It describes an ancient ritual to cut a covenant or treaty. In this ritual, the animals would be prepared (cut in two). Then the two parties entering into covenant would walk down the middle of the bifurcated animals and say this to each other, "I promise to keep the terms of this covenant. If I break this covenant, may it be with me like it is with these animals —cut in two." Thus, the phrase "cut" a covenant.

The weirdness of this story, though, isn't the animals cut in two or even the smoking firepot and flaming torch. The weirdness is that Abram was asleep through the whole thing! God, represented by the smoke and fire, was the only party participating in the covenant.

God made God's promise to Abram without Abram's participation. God's promise was unconditional. God's grace was unbounded.

When Jesus talks about his work coming to completion, he knows it will be without any participation from those for whom he's doing it. His work is unconditional too...again, grace unbounded.

So...back to the fox and the hen. Our hen, Jesus, is not fooled by the cunning of the fox. He knows Herod has murderous intent. Again, here's where our hen differs from the hen in the poem — in refusing to stay high on his perch. The Jesus Hen must come down to protect his chicks. The Pharisees try to get him to run for his life — hide.

Are they sincerely trying to protect him? Or...Are they trying to scare him away from going to Jerusalem? Who knows? Luke doesn't tell us. What matters, really, is that what they are suggesting is the very thing that would, effectively, stop him from his work. And he's no more going to be diverted from fulfilling his mission than God would be from fulfilling God's promise to Abram in the cutting of the covenant.

Besides, Jesus had already faced the temptation to save his skin rather than go on with his mission. The tempter tried to manipulate him with fear in the wilderness. Remember? That was last Sunday's story. Jesus did not succumb to the temptation for safety that time either. Nothing will stop him, certainly not Herod.

Herod is a huge threat, but he has no say. Jesus kind of mocks the suggestion that Herod could have any control over him. And he sets his face once again, commits again, to faithfulness in his mission — day after day after day, bringing about the kingdom of God through healing and liberation of humankind from that which enslaves us. He's on his way, and he'll keep going until his work is complete — and, of course, by referencing the third day, on which his work will be finished...he's alluding to his resurrection. The resurrection is the completion.

Well...guess what. There's no resurrection without crucifixion. So, Jesus' face is set to go to Jerusalem, knowing that, there, he will be rejected and killed. The hen has come down from the perch to protect all the chicks. And will die doing it.

In the meanwhile, he says, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem. If only I could protect you from yourself.

Can't you just see those chicks all over Jerusalem, running around crazy — every direction — in a dangerous mixture of naiveté and fear, being tricked by that old fox, rejecting the hen's efforts to gather and save them, and running right into the fox's teeth. The chicks don't recognize the danger of the fox. They are easily tricked — and a little bit stupid. But Jesus will not be stopped in his mission for those crazy chicks — even though the chicks will reject him and go to the fox instead.

Now, the fox in the story is Herod, but we all know, the fox takes on many disguises in the overall human story, and we, in our naiveté and fear or naiveté and pain or addiction or lust or greed or narcissism or individualism, we succumb again and again — rejecting our protecting hen. We turn away from our protecting, loving hen and turn to the cunning old fox that is within us — that wily fox that's part of our broken social condition, that's tearing us apart and setting us at odds with each other as we all struggle to gain and hold on to power in a struggle that leaves too many of us vulnerable and in danger of being devoured.

The war in Ukraine is simply the most recent example of our being lured by the temptation of power at all costs. We can single out Putin as the villain of the day, but we can't ignore the truth that he us just one very sick part of a universally broken humanity. We all want to be the fox...not realizing the power of grace, not realizing the power of the hen.

We are as culpable for the death of our hen as those chicks in Jerusalem on the day of crucifixion. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that day you represented all of humanity! Jesus, our hen, was your liberator and healer, and even though you rejected him, he refused to stay safely on the perch and, instead, was raised up on a cross.

On that cross, Jesus did draw the chicks under his protective wings. He drew Jerusalem under his wings even though Jerusalem rejected him. He drew humanity under his wings even though we constantly run toward the fox.

But... In that age-old contest of wits between the fox and the hen, our fox outwits the fox! Our hen refused to stay dead. It seems, with Jesus, you don't get crucifixion without resurrection, too! And by not staying dead, he takes all the power away from the fox...away from all the foxes that would devour us.

He liberated all of humanity from that within us which would enslave us, and he heals our brokenness.

And that's the story of the fox and the hen.