

Ah, what a beautiful image, the fox in the hen house.

I mean, the Bible was written thousands of years ago, but what an accessible metaphor.

I think we can all envision what a chicken coop would look like the morning after a fox spent the night in it.

But, side note, I did just read an article from the BBC published last week about how a flock of chickens in northwestern France did band together and kill a juvenile fox who was accidentally locked in their coop overnight.

So, I guess it does sometimes happen that the tables turn, but that was an unusual outcome.

We know that normally, if a fox is left alone with a bunch of chickens, it's going to be a bloodbath, and the fox isn't going to be the one shedding the blood.

In today's Gospel story, Jesus calls Herod a fox and he refers to himself as a hen, so it's pretty clear who's who.

But I actually think there's more than one fox in this story.

Herod isn't the only fox, the Pharisees are foxes too.

They are out for Jesus' blood.

You see, it might appear at first read like the Pharisees are being surprisingly benevolent.

I mean, they tell Jesus, hey, get out of here, Herod wants to kill you.

It kind of seems like they're looking out for Jesus.

But all is not as it appears on the surface.

I think their warning to Jesus was deceptive.

It may or may not have been a fabrication, an outright lie, but it was conveyed to Jesus *not* to protect him, as it appears, but instead to get him out of their sight.

They wanted a reason to have Jesus arrested, but they couldn't pin anything on him.

So, they're getting increasingly frustrated while his teachings and healings were generating more and more palpable enthusiasm among the masses.

Their weak attempt to hustle Jesus away only showed how content they were to stay away from Jesus' ministry, and Jesus wasn't to be fooled by them.

He could see right through the Pharisees.

In a nice twist of irony, Jesus tells the Pharisees to go back to Herod and deliver the message that Jesus is not about to stop his ministry.

This neatly trapped the Pharisees.

After all, how did they know Herod wanted to kill Jesus?

What were they doing talking to the Jewish enemy?

If they really had such easy access to him as to be able to deliver Jesus' message back to the King, just what did that say about the Pharisees?

Did they really have the best interests of their fellow Jews at heart if they were associating with Herod, the enemy?

Herod and the Pharisees are foxes who are out to get the hen.

I actually think that Luke using the image of Jesus as the hen gathering her chicks under her wings is beautiful.

This reminds us that God's love transcends gender, as much as we hear God referred to as "he," this passage reminds us that God's love is maternal.

And, considering only 49 women are named in the Bible and their words only take up roughly 1.1% of the entire Bible, it's important to lift up the maternal images and female voices when we hear them.

So, while God as mother is not the focus of my sermon today, I don't want us to lose that important textual point in this story.

Jesus, as the hen, the mother, was the definition of courage and vulnerability.

You see, there's a few kinds of courage in this world. There's the instinctual courage which motivates us to make instantaneous decisions.

This courage is the kind that leads people into burning buildings, to pull people off of railroad tracks.

This courage is what drives us to risk our lives for the sake of others.

But this isn't the kind of courage that Jesus displays.

His courage is slow and measured and he recommitments himself to it over and over again.

He had so many opportunities to stay away from Jerusalem, at least until after the fervor surrounding him died down.

He could have gone and hidden in the woods until Herod got distracted by something else and forgot about pursuing Jesus.

But Jesus didn't do that.

He anticipated the challenge and the suffering, he even foreshadowed his death, and yet he kept going.

He kept walking towards Jerusalem because he knew there were people in that city who needed him, and he wasn't going to be a coward and turn away just to save his own skin.

The book that we are reading in our book study for Lent is by the researcher and storyteller Brené Brown.

In her book, she reminds us that courage comes from the Latin word, “cor,” meaning heart.

She defines courage as living from the heart, the willingness to embrace our vulnerability in order to be our authentic selves.

Jesus was as vulnerable as they come, he had no weapons no security guard, no way to defend himself.

And yet he knew that his calling, his authentic self, was to serve others, to help others.

The image of the mother hen is the perfect illustration of this kind of courage and vulnerability.

After all, I wonder if parenthood isn't a combination of courage and vulnerability mixed with deep love.

You become vulnerable because this new being is now basically your heart walking around outside your body.

And you can't protect it from all the threats that life presents, but you know that whatever happens to your child, happens to you too.

And that's where the courage comes in, you have the courage and resolve to stay committed and connected to your child, open to experiencing whatever joys and sorrows they experience.

Just as Jesus walked straight towards Jerusalem, I've heard that being a parent means being willing to walk right towards risk and danger if you're doing it for the sake of your child.

Jesus loved the people in Jerusalem as if they were his own children.

He wanted to help them, to protect them, to show them that they were God's beloved children.

And he was willing to risk his life to do that.

That's how much he loved them.

Continuing with our Lenten theme of cultivating and letting go, Jesus had to cultivate courage and trust in God in order to respond to the Pharisees in the way that he did.

He had to trust that God had a greater plan for him that was bigger than any threat from Herod or the Pharisees.

And he had to let go of fear and self-reliance.

He could not give into his fears, otherwise he would have gone to hide in the woods until everything blew over.

He also had to let go of the illusion of self-reliance.

He couldn't face the risks and dangers in Jerusalem without God's love and support buoying him up.

I imagine he couldn't have done that unless he was confident that that's what God wanted of him.

It doesn't say so in the text, but I wonder if Jesus had an honest conversation with God before responding to the Pharisees.

I wonder if, after they told him to get out of there, maybe he prayed about it, maybe he asked God if God *really* wanted him to stay the course towards Jerusalem.

Maybe, only then, was he able to have the courage to call Herod a fox and continue on his way into the fox's den that was waiting for him.

Either way, he certainly had to let go of any illusions that he could go it alone.

And perhaps through cultivating his courage and trust in God, he was able to let go of any fears that might have held him back.

I hope that none of us will be asked to die for what we believe in, but I do think that it's an important thought exercise.

If we were warned that someone wanted to harm us, but we knew that they were with people who needed us, would we go?

Would you walk into the fox's den, if you knew that you were the hen they were out to get?

Just like Jesus, we too are called to let go of the illusion of self-reliance and fear while cultivating courage and trust in God.

We need each other, and we need each other to be as committed to God as possible, so that we have the courage to vulnerably protect one another, should the need arise.

We know, intellectually that we are all God's children and we are enough, as we are.

We know that those around us are also God's beloved children and are therefore deserve our love, empathy, and respect.

That's a lot easier to think about than it is to act on.

As Christians, we are called to cultivate the courage which emboldens us to act in such a way that we are able to protect others when they're threatened,

when they're not being treated with the love, empathy and respect that they deserve.

Because, as the famous saying goes, "If not us, who? If not now, when?" Amen.