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St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota
9:00 and 11:00 a.m. Celebrations of the Holy Eucharist
The Second Sunday in Lent; February 21, 2016

“A Hen Guarding the Foxhouse?”

Scripture: Luke 13:31-35

Personally, I suppose I would have to question the wisdom of having the hen guard the foxhouse.

No, you didn't hear me wrong. I know the old fable about crafty foxes and helpless hens and the naiveté of having the predator looking after the prey ---the proverbial fox guarding the henhouse---, but in this case, it's the other way around. Here is Jesus, desiring to be like a mother hen gathering up her brood of chicks to shelter them under the safety of her wing, but apparently when it comes to life in Jerusalem, too many of the so called “brood” act more like foxes than like baby chicks. Jesus says Jerusalem is a city “... that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it.” He knows it isn't necessarily a good bet putting his “mother hen” up against Herod's crafty fox. After all, hens aren't necessarily known for their speed or power or ability to overwhelm a hungry fox. But Jesus says he is going to do his work anyway, scooping up the ones who need him and holding them closely under his wings, casting out their demons, soothing their sorrows, healing them of their infirmities today and tomorrow and the next day, right in

Herod's sight, finishing up his work whether the ol' fox likes it or not. It's a risky thing to do. But it's also a kind thing to do. It's something we can do.

You know, it feels nice to have someone look after us, doesn't it? Somebody who cares and who comforts. It starts when we are little. I remember like it was yesterday... the day I split my lip wide open playing games in the Sunday School playground back in Florida. I was maybe six years old? And while some of the children just stood back and pointed and laughed, my teacher, Mrs. Bennett, gathered me up in her arms like I weighed nothing, and she held me tightly and carried me to the bathroom where she rinsed my face clean and wiped my eyes and made me feel that everything would be okay. (Of course I was mortified at the time that she took me into the girls' bathroom.) And you know that having raised three chicks in my own brood, I've returned that care and that comfort many times over, cleaning up that skinned knee or putting a band-aid over a bug bite, or lending a comfortable shoulder, or chasing the monsters out of the closets or listening to the tribulations of the teen years.

How natural and how necessary it is for someone who is hurt or threatened physically or emotionally to want someone who is willing to gather them up in her arms, cradle them, and help them feel safe. Yet in the absence of such simple care,

how quickly we might learn to suspect others, to mistrust the one who would shelter us, and press away from the one who would care for us.

I wonder.... Maybe Jerusalem had become that way. Maybe the people had spent so much time under the cold and cruel leadership of the foxes (like Herod) that they had come to suspect anyone who would comfort them under the shadow of their wing, any who would offer them hope. Maybe they had forgotten what it felt like to receive the care of someone who loved them and would try to help them be well and safe and happy. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!” That is such a lament from Jesus. Might *we* feel some of Jesus’ sadness when all he wants is to love his people, yet they press him away, because they are not willing ---or able --- to receive him? Maybe they don’t even recognize their need for his care and protection from the likes of that fox, King Herod. Really... what good does it do to have a mother hen like Jesus guarding a foxhouse?

How are you in this season of Lent? How are *we* coming along? Have we taken time to consider our hurts and pains, our needs and wants, our offenses to others, our broken places and our sadness? Oh, I know we feel them. But have we settled down long enough to know what ails us, to know what within us needs to be

healed? In this world that surrounds us with so many foxes just looking out for their own benefit, I wonder if we would be any more open and trusting than the people of Jesus' Jerusalem of the one who wants to gather us under his wings and comfort us and heal us and make us whole. Or have we become accustomed to the foxes in the henhouse? I hope that we do not fall into the same trap as the people of Jerusalem in Jesus' day, the trap that calls us to feel that we don't need Jesus or that we don't trust him or want him to heal us.

Soon, Jesus will lay down his life in Jerusalem. Soon he will choose faith and love over power and control. That's how he will choose to care for us, to protect us, to love us... by dying for us rather than by controlling us. Were it my own wisdom, I might question having a hen guard the foxhouse, but I won't question God's wisdom. Jesus is teaching us the power of love, the necessity of perseverance in love, even when it is not returned, even in the face of apathy, hatred, or danger. Jesus reveals the generosity of God; God's longing to provide us with kindness and nurture. And Jesus expresses the deep lament of one who knows of our sadness and struggle, in this life and in our time. And Jesus would comfort, forgive, and heal us if we let him. This is one instance when the hen has it all over the fox. The question is: Which one will you trust?