

Lent 2C (2/21/2016)  
 Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18  
 Psalm 27  
 Philippians 3:17-4:1  
**Luke 13:31-35**

*Kings get to be kings by plotting, jockeying, and maneuvering. Power is won and lost by strategic competition, and maintained by force. So, it's natural that King Herod and company are threatened by the alternative kingdom Jesus proclaims, and it's natural that their response is scheming and violent. But Jesus will not be implicated in the world's game, and will respond with motherly love even to those who reject him.*

The fox and the hen. Jesus' imagery in our Gospel from Luke today practically begs to be read as a fable, a barnyard parable depicting two wildly different ways of exercising power. The fox and the hen. Herod and Jesus. The kingdom of the world and the kingdom of God.

As Jesus makes his way toward Jerusalem, some Pharisees approach him with a warning: "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." Is this an earnest attempt to keep Jesus from danger, or a ruse to rid themselves of his influence among the people? Regardless of the Pharisees' motives for the warning, it's not unreasonable to believe that Herod is, in fact, searching for Jesus to harm him. Recall that John the Baptist, another threat to power, did not remain free for long, and he did not survive long once in Herod's custody.<sup>1</sup>

Isn't this the way of the world? Kings get to be kings by plotting, jockeying, and maneuvering. Power is won and lost by strategic competition,

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<sup>1</sup> See Luke 9:9.

and maintained by force. So, it's natural that Herod and other members of the political-religious elite are threatened by the alternative kingdom Jesus proclaims, and it's natural that their response is scheming and violent.

But Jesus is not deterred by fear. To the Pharisees' warning, he responds, "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.'" *That fox.* Herod does not merit Jesus' respect. He is a puppet king, a lackey who rules not by right, but only by the will of the Roman Emperor. And, he preserves his power and wealth by preying on the mostly poor Galilean population. His rule is founded on conniving and abuse. As such, Herod fails to meet the standards for righteous kingship, according to the biblical criteria, and Jesus "pegs [him] as a varmint in the Lord's field, a murderer of God's agents, a would-be disrupter of the divine economy," to borrow the words of one interpreter.<sup>2</sup>

Herod is a fox, but Jesus is a hen. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem," he laments, "the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!" His grief is sincere. Jesus is not naïve to the dynamics of power in Israel's chief city. Jerusalem, like Herod, represents the political and religious status quo, and as such, the city has a reputation in Jewish tradition for rejecting prophets, or challengers, those called by God to call the people – and especially those in

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<sup>2</sup> J.A. Darr, as cited in Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 536.

power – back to faithfulness. Jesus is no fool. His gospel, like previous prophecy, is a threat to the regime, and he knows that his arrival in Jerusalem is bound to be met with hostility.

Yet, Jesus does not respond to hostility with hostility. His lament over Jerusalem continues: “How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings....” Political machination and violent repression – the ways of Herod and Jerusalem – are radically at odds with the ways of God’s kingdom. And, Jesus will not be implicated in the world’s game. **The Chosen One of God is not like a fox who prowls the barnyard preying on the weak, but rather a hen who wraps her chicks in a comforting embrace. Jesus will not be led by kingly hostility, but rather by motherly love, even toward those who reject him.**

The fox and the hen. It’s a parable not only for the world of the first century, but also for our world today. Think of the latter-day prophets who have given their lives in service to God’s justice and love. Above the entrance to Westminster Abbey in London is a beautiful frieze depicting a series of 20<sup>th</sup> century martyrs. Among them are Dietrich Bonhoeffer of Germany, Martin Luther King, Jr. of the United States, Janani Luwum of Uganda, and Oscar Romero of El Salvador. These prophets might have echoed Jesus’ lament in their own time, replacing “Jerusalem, Jerusalem” with “Berlin, Berlin,” “Washington, Washington,” “Kampala, Kampala,” or “San Salvador, San

Salvador,” those modern centers of influence where the powerful have trampled the interests of the vulnerable. It’s a thankless job to tell the hard truth, and prophets pay a high price for calling us to repentance. Often, we simply reject those who insist that we violate the kingdom of God by our silent consent to violence and injustice, and that we need to change.

Jesus’ prophetic mission leads straight to the cross. But, **on the third day, he finishes his work. Contrary to conventional wisdom, rejection and crucifixion cannot undermine his final purpose. In the end, neither Herod nor Jerusalem can kill the kingdom Jesus brings. His resurrection is a display of God’s power to give life in the face of worldly powers that deal death. It’s a sign that prophets do not die in vain, but rise with Jesus to fill us with their spirit. And, enfolded in the wings of our mother hen – held in the grace and love of the living Christ – we don’t need to be afraid of foxes, or replicate their antagonism. Instead, in spite of the foxes, we can learn to love like Jesus, like a mother hen.**