



It was quite tempting to call John Binder and see if he would bring a hen to share our sermon time this morning (Dan vetoed that idea at Bible Study on Wednesday, so you're safe this morning!). Or, to get a copy of the game "Fox & Geese" and have us see if we can be smart enough to corner the fox rather than having the fox corner the chickens. Or perhaps capture the fox that periodically makes its way across our back yard!

The Gospel this morning is an unusual instance where the Pharisees come to Jesus to warn him of Herod. Usually, the Pharisees are portrayed in Scripture as rigid authorities who seek to condemn Jesus. Definitely not his friends or ones who would be looking out for his well-being. It's a bit of a role reversal for them to be warning Jesus that Herod wants to kill him and that Jesus would be wise to pack his bags and head for the hills. I'm wondering if the Pharisees warned Jesus because they were afraid of being caught up with him and blamed for what Jesus was saying and doing- a bit of self-protectiveness, if you will. Guilt by association.

Jesus hears the warning and then responds with "Go and tell that fox for me: Listen I am casting our demons and performing cures today and tomorrow and on the third day I finish my work" (Luke 13:32). Foxes are – then and now, I suspect- often viewed with suspicion even as they are beautiful creatures. Foxes are depicted as crafty and wily, sneaky, sly and able to exploit weaknesses in hen houses and so eat all the chickens.

Herod, as a political appointee of the Roman Empire, was likely pretty crafty and wily himself so the image of Herod as a fox is realistic to me. Herod had to be crafty and wily to navigate the political environment: walking a fine line between keeping the Jews in line, avoiding rebellion and also finding a way to please those who placed him in power. For Herod, as for many other political appointees whose longevity in office and thus enjoyment of the perquisites of power, finding a way to control his environment was imperative. Jesus was viewed as a threat to Herod's well-being. Thus, the Pharisees warn Jesus that Jesus should run and hide.

Perhaps the Pharisees issued the warning because they knew if Jesus got picked up for sedition and treason, their interactions with Jesus would be called into question. They might then be looked at by the authorities to determine if the Pharisees might agree with Jesus, have been supporting him, or somehow acted in ways that defied the authorities. If that were to happen, the Pharisees might find themselves as prisoners of the Romans. So perhaps the Pharisees warning Jesus to run and flee was part of a larger effort to save their own skins.

Genesis 15: 1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3: 17-4:1; Luke 13: 31-35

Jesus confounds the Pharisees, as he usually does, by doing the opposite.

Jesus does not drop the work he is doing. He does not respond with fear and trembling. Rather, Jesus says he wants to be like a hen that gathers her children under her wings to protect them from a predator. I read that if a fox gets into a henhouse, a mother hen will gather her chicks under her wings, backing them into a corner and then puff out her chest so that the fox has to attack and kill the mother before the fox can get to the chicks. This is the image that Jesus lays out for us: Jesus will gather us under God's protection. Jesus will not resist the Empire but rather will offer up himself, protecting us even to the point of his death.

Jesus also reminds the Pharisees that he has been doing and will continue to do work necessary to bring about the realm of God. "Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work." Eerily predictive of Jesus's own death and resurrection on the third day. Doing the work of God to restore those cursed with demons or other illnesses to society, to their families, to becoming a productive part of society again.

Jesus knows that his time of trial is coming but he does not run away from it. Rather, he continues doing what God has called him to do, understanding that he is vulnerable and his time on earth is growing shorter.

Being vulnerable is not easy to do. As humans, we seek to protect ourselves in a variety of ways. At Halloween we often wear masks as part of our costume- a night to be someone or something else for a bit of fun. For most of us, the mask comes off at the end of the evening and the next morning we are once again who we are- warts and all. But for some, those masks are such that they don't know who they are because the mask is so strong. Jesus shows us another way. He lives **without** masks. He is who he is. He does not need to be separated from God or from other humans. He lives a fully authentic life, knowing where he comes from and where he is going. Jesus models how we can be vulnerable, loving, and do the work that brings us closer to each other and to God.

We mourn today the tragedy in Christchurch on Friday. The killing of people worshipping God as they understand God. The fact that we understand God differently in some respects and we worship differently does not excuse the taking of life. The psychology of the gunman- posting the murders live on Facebook – and of other people in forwarding such posting to others truly baffles me. I also find it ironic that the killer opposed immigration, when he himself was not from New Zealand. It seems to be so easy to hate these days and too often so hard to love. It ought to be the other way around: easy to love and hard to hate.

It's another case of separating ourselves from one another rather than working to learn about and respect the dignity of others. Several years back, Pope Francis asked about building bridges rather than building walls. Jesus tore down walls wherever they set up barriers between people. Jesus built bridges in his healing, in his teaching and in his death.

The bridges that Jesus built helped restore the sick and the disenfranchised to their proper place in their society. Once "clean" they could return to their families and could once again become productive members of society. They could even, as the one leper out of the ten who were healed come back to Jesus, praising God and understanding where their healing came from.

Genesis 15: 1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3: 17-4:1; Luke 13: 31-35

In his teaching Jesus reminds us that the two great commandments are to love God and to love neighbor. To do whatever it takes to restore relationships, not tear them apart because outwardly we are different- rather to know deep inside of us that we are, ultimately, the same: children of God, loved by God whether we want that love or not. Building bridges to hope and a life of love and compassion for all creation.

Jesus has a timetable. Today, tomorrow and on the third day the work is done. We, too, have a timetable although we do not know when our third day will come- that day is in God's hands. Our challenge, then, is to live and care for each other in the best way we can, knowing that the time may be short. It may be long, too, but we don't know the end time. Therefore, today, tomorrow and for as long as it takes until our third day comes, live and build bridges with one another.

Say to this world's Herod: I will protect my children- those I love and those I am called to serve- as best I can from all the world throws at them. I will smile and thank a wait-person. I will hold a door that is too heavy for someone approaching. I will offer food to the hungry and clothes to the naked. I will visit the sick. I will offer my gifts and talents to the world so that the Glory of God may be evident in all that I do and all that I say.

And if the fox comes for me and my children, I will gather the chicks under my wings and protect them as best as I can, even to the point of my own death. I will stand true to my faith even when it is hard. Even when the world urges me to flee for the hills.

It's easy to build walls. And mostly walls are built because we are afraid. We are afraid of being vulnerable. We are afraid of being truly known- each of us has something deep inside of us that we hope others never find out. We are afraid that if they truly knew us, they wouldn't like us anymore. They would turn aside, and that hurts. It hurts deep down inside when those we love turn aside. That fear causes us to build walls, including walls to separate ourselves from God.

Jesus gives us the example of a life lived in spite of fear. I'm sure Jesus recognized that Herod had the power to end his life. Despite that, Jesus follows God's calling to continue to work to restore the world to health by healing and by teaching and by living a life with God that supersedes the world. This is a life, and these are choices that we can emulate. We can choose to live in faith, knowing at times we will fear, but that we are beloved of God and that God is like a mother hen, protecting her chicks from the wily fox. **Amen.**