

LENT2.C1
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SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT
February 28, 2010

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

Luke 13:31-35

³¹At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." ³²He said to them, "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. ³³Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' ³⁴Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

We continue our Lenten journey with a story of Jesus being warned that Herod intends to harm him. I said "we continue our Lenten journey" because a "journey" is the standard metaphor for Lent: getting from one place to another. We remember the forty years that the liberated slaves took to get to the Promised Land. We remember the forty days that Jesus spent between his baptism and the beginning of his ministry. So, it is not surprising that we have this story. Jesus is warned about Herod and he responds that he will not be turned aside from his journey. The words are: "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. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.'" Jesus will not be turned aside from his purpose. "I must be on my way."

Then Jesus goes on to lament over Jerusalem. He says he wishes he could protect the people of the city like a hen gathers her chicks beneath her wings. When I was preparing the sermon based on this Gospel reading, I noticed for the first time that Jesus calls Herod a “fox” and then compares himself to a “hen”. I am just as familiar with the old saying about a fox in a henhouse as you are, but this was the first time I noticed Jesus’ metaphor.

You do not want a fox in your henhouse but that is because you are afraid that he will eat your chickens before you get a chance. A fox does not have the same life-threatening reputation as a wolf. A fox is a distracting nuisance. People do not hide from a fox; they either chase it away or take its picture.

Jesus called Herod “that fox”. He acknowledged that Herod was the emperor who had a great deal of authority. After all, it had been Herod who had executed John the Baptist just to liven up his birthday party. But Jesus called him a “fox” and placed him in the category of a petty thief – clever and sly, but, in the end, not threatening. Certainly, Herod would not interrupt his journey to Jerusalem. Jesus had a destination and he would reach it.

Jesus was headed toward Jerusalem, as he called it “the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!” He was on his way to a confrontation with the powers of evil.

On his journey from his baptism to the cross, Jesus is preaching, healing, teaching, making friends with sinners and proclaiming the kingdom of God is at hand. The greatest danger is not one that Herod or any other worldly authority would bring, it is the danger of being sidetracked from his mission. That mission is the proclamation that God’s kingdom is at hand, available to all, including those this society has written off: widows, debtors,

sinner, tax collectors and little children. Jesus' devotion to his mission is in fact a fierce love for those who need to hear this message – as strong as a hen has for her chicks. If sticking to his brood, these lost and little ones, makes him more vulnerable to the likes of foxes like Herod, so be it.

There is much anxiety in our world. It is a tax supported function of government to tell us how much danger we are in. They've color-coded the threat levels so we will understand them better. Terrorism, economic depression, street crime or the flu – we are assaulted with the message that we might be assaulted. (Usually we get the preliminary warning and then are promised a fuller explanation after the commercial.) Sometimes the messengers are right. We are fragile beings and it does not take much to lead us into catastrophe.

But the point of a journey is to travel to a destination, not to stay safe. We could spend so much time guarding our health, our possessions, and our safety that we miss the point of traveling this life at all. If Jesus' life is our model, we do not imagine that the safe path is always the faithful one

The journey is a dangerous place, but we go with Jesus. We all know of people who continue on the journey and who inspire us with their devotion to showing God's love along the way. The foxes of this world have stolen away their treasure, health, reputation, sometimes even loved ones. They are the couples who have faced loss together and still find their way to church together. There are the elderly people who have lost spouses and children, yet still give themselves over to loving new strangers that walk into their lives. There are those who have had job loss after job loss, yet still give generously to those who have less. They are people hobbled by mental illness or addiction, who still manage to get

out of themselves and care for others. They are Christians who have been disappointed by their church, yet have said “Lord, to whom shall we go?” The journey is different for each of us, but following Jesus brings joy despite the risks.

Jesus is so certain of his mission that even kings appear to be no more than foxes — nuisance, dog-sized carnivores who cannot have the last word. Jesus says the last word will be the accomplishment of his mission, the final evidence that God’s kingdom is at hand, and even death itself will not get in the way of that.

The journey will continue to Jerusalem, all the way to the cross. It will not end until the tomb is empty.