

As a Hen Gathers Her Brood

First Congregational Church Branford

Luke 13:31-35; March 17, 2019

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Today's scripture scene begins right after Jesus had preached a difficult message *for those in power to hear* - that those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last.

1 At *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 away from 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." '

The word of God for the people of God.

Lent only has 6 Sundays to tell the story of Jesus' ministry before his death and resurrection, so we've had to hurry this along from last week's temptation story to a confrontation already with the Pharisees! What happened in between?! Let's review what Jesus did after the temptation. Jesus goes home, is rejected by his own people who aren't willing to accept that one of them could be the Messiah. Which is understandable - it's like if the son of your next door neighbors' declares himself to be the Messiah! *Um, I don't think so. We know you and your family too well. We know Mary doesn't wash her windows and we saw little Yeshua throw that tomato at Mrs. John's fence!* No, Jesus needs a fresh start, with new people, so he goes off to heal and preach. He calls his first disciples, cleanses a leper, heals a paralytic, teaches scripture, performs an exorcism, chooses the rest of the disciples, teaches to love your enemies, calms a storm when they're out at sea, heals some more, feeds the five thousand – word is beginning to spread about him – there are more healings, and then...yikes! Jesus up and denounces Pharisees and lawyers! Oh, no, you didn't, Jesus! What had happened was that Pharisee had been amazed to see that Jesus didn't first wash before dinner, and Jesus lit into him: "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are full of greed

and wickedness. You fools!” He goes *on and on*, and attacks the lawyers, too! Well... those in power don't take very well to this kind of affront. But, our Jesus felt called to expose lies, no matter what. This past week Jesus may have helped expose the college cheating scam, to shine light on what was happening, in an effort to purify college admissions.

Purify the temple, purify college admissions, purify wherever there are lies. Purify, purify, purify.

So, Jesus is going through one town and village after another, teaching and healing as he makes his way to Jerusalem - the great, holy city of the temple - which had become *so corrupted* - where prophet after prophet were stoned to death for confronting dishonest practices - such as priests taking more of the offering than they should, and scamming widows for their money - to name just a couple. Well... those in power enjoy living the high life - they aren't about to change anything! So, you betcha they're like, “We don't need anybody coming in here telling us we're doing it wrong. We are the temple! Rome is happy with us. We give them their cut. As long as order is maintained, they leave us alone – so, when a meddling prophet enters our gates, we have to get rid of them.” Remember, Jerusalem was under Roman rule, so everybody answered to Rome. And, you'd best believe it was Rome who mostly made out on the money.

Speaking of trying to keep the Temple holy... this past week a hate-filled anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, white nationalist shooter corrupted 2 other of God's temples, 2 mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand where this gunman fox killed 50 praying chicks. 50 praying chicks! That fox. People of God, let us pray for religious and racial tolerance, compassion for immigrants, and for Temples everywhere to be kept HOLY. Holy, Holy, Holy.... Lord, God Almighty.

Returning to the scripture, some Pharisees - they weren't all bad - might've been looking out for Jesus by giving him warning that King Herod wanted to kill him. Herod didn't much like hearing the title, King of the Jews. He felt jealous and threatened. *He was the King of the Jews*, thank you very much.

You can hear Jesus' anger and rage in his response, *Go and tell that fox* such and such, but then we hear a shift.... Jesus seems to pause after he mentions the stoning of proph... knowing very well where this is headed for himself. Then he mournfully says, “How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”... *Come to me, let me protect you.*

Jerusalem was a dangerous place for its residents, who were like pale yellow chicks running around, with at least one fox. *At least* one fox. In the absence of a mother hen, some of the chicks - the Pharisees - have taken to following the fox – Herod. The rest of the chicks are out in the open where *anything* with claws can get to them. But, now the hen is there with a gold halo around her head clucking

for all she's worth! Cluck, cluck, cluck, cluck, cluck, cluck! She wants to protect them all! The Pharisees, Herods, the people. She loves them. But, the Pharisee chicks can't hear her, and the ones that do are so badly beaten down by Rome's enslaving system they can't recognize a voice of nurture and protection.

If you have ever loved someone you could not protect... then you understand the depth of Jesus' lament... when someone you love is unwilling to see and go another way – they don't want to be healed - they're so wrapped up in being in charge of their own life. They don't want you and your way. You can open your arms - but you cannot make anyone walk into them. So, there you are - with wings spread, breast exposed – the most vulnerable posture in the world. But, if you love someone, if you are a protector, if you mean what you say, then this is how you stand...

It's how many Americans stand when refugee parents and children are separated, and children are in cages. No, not to those children you don't, not to those babies. It's how many Americans stand with the poor, *someone to watch over them*, to look out for them. Someone to watch over them! Our people! And, I'm sure it's how you'll want your new Minister to stand, protective over you and the church, this great church. I love you.

The Rev. Dr. Barbara Brown Taylor has some sermon comments about this text that I'd like to share. She says, given the number of animals available, it is curious that Jesus chooses a hen. Where is the biblical precedent for *that*? What about the mighty eagle of Exodus, or Hosea's stealthy leopard? What about the proud lion of Judah, mowing down his enemies with a roar? Compared to any of those, a mother hen does not inspire much confidence! No wonder some of the chicks decided to go with the fox. [Oh, please protect me Mr. Fox. You're so big, and smart, and I know you'll look after me.]...

But a hen is what Jesus chooses, which -- if you think about it -- is pretty typical of him. He's always turning things upside down, so that children and peasants wind up on top while kings and scholars land on the bottom. So of course he chooses a chicken. He had two options, be a fox and live by licking your chops, or be a chicken, and die protecting the chicks.

Jesus is no king of the jungle – in this story or any other. What he is is a mother hen, who stands between the chicks and those who mean to do them harm... She has no fangs, no claws, no rippling muscles. All she has is her willingness to shield her babies with her own body. If the fox wants them, he will have to kill her first...

Which, the fox does, as it turns out. He slides up on her one night in the yard while all the babies are asleep. When her cry wakens them, the chicks scatter. She dies the next day - wings spread, breast exposed -- without a single chick beneath her feathers. It breaks her heart, but it does not change a thing... Because

if you mean what you say... then this is how you stand. This is how you stand.
Amen.