

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to Jesus, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill You." Jesus 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. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on My way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside Jerusalem.' Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often I have desire to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, 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.'"

Power and politics are part of the world we live in and it's interesting that we hear this scripture from Luke when we've recently heard Pope Francis' critique of the religious faith of presidential hopeful Donald Trump. Religion and politics aren't separate in us any more than sacred and secular are separate in us. What we believe influences everything we do and most importantly how we see the world. But in the public square religion and politics have to be separate for the protection of others who believe differently than we do. This is an American value. We allow people to think and believe and vote differently than we do because we are free people. I've never paid any real attention to a pope before Pope Francis, and I'm captivated by him. He makes me want to be a better Christian. He makes me want to take Jesus' words about power, powerlessness, and the poor, more to heart.

This is the second Sunday in Lent and these six weeks will go by as quickly as six weeks ever did unless we stop the clock of "life as usual" and enter into a slower, more intentional time of looking at Jesus and taking His words more to heart. Who was this Jesus who could have wiped Herod, whom the Pharisees told Jesus wanted to kill Him, off the face of the earth and instead allowed the fear-driven political and religious

machine to nail Him to a cross? Christians believe that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine, fully God, and that Jesus, in order to be fully one of us... emptied Himself of His divinity and was as powerless and vulnerable as the least of us. All the while Jesus apparently knew the political and religious machine was rolling towards Him with the intent of rolling Him under the sod.

Last Sunday found us in the desert with Jesus, where He was tempted by the devil to give up, or to pervert, His humanity, and to use His power and His divinity to shield Himself from our common human desperation, vulnerability, and craving. We begin Lent in the desert with Jesus so that we understand that He faced what we face, and He can help us and be present with us, when we are fearful, weak and tempted.

We hear Herod's name in today's gospel... which we haven't heard since Epiphany.... When the magi who followed the star, searching for the Messiah, met with Herod the Great, who then in a paranoid frenzy ordered the murder of all baby boys under two years in case one of them was this new king. In today's scripture this is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. The Pharisees, who were not friends or supporters of Jesus, for some reason came to warn Him that Herod Antipas wanted to kill Him. Jesus' answer to them was as political, and subtle and sly as their message to Him. This is from *The Message* translation: "Tell that fox that I've no time for him right now. Today and tomorrow I'm busy clearing out the demons and healing the sick; the third day I'm wrapping things up." This coded message Jesus sent to the Pharisees and to Herod told them that nothing would come between Jesus and His mission to love, heal, and serve humanity... and that despite the coming terrible Friday they had planned for Him and the following bleak Saturday, resurrection would be on the third

day; the day when God's power would truly be revealed. Jesus' message was that nothing, not the Pharisees, and not Herod, and not hell itself, could come between God's love and us. Jesus would proclaim this message - He would take this gospel of God's covenant love for us - all the way to Jerusalem, the seat of power.

There are all kinds of scriptural references to God as an eagle that Jesus could have used to describe Himself. We sang two songs at the beginning of worship about the eagle's wings of God, and we'll sing another at the close of worship. But Jesus chose a different image... not the soaring eagle with its 8 ft. wing span, but of a small and vulnerable mother hen. He juxtaposed this image of Himself as a defenseless chicken against the image of Herod as a predatory fox. It was clear who wielded the power. It was clear whose priority was love and care of her children. Jesus as a mother hen would brood over - warm, cover, and protect - His chicks which is the same image from Genesis when God's Spirit brooded, hovered over, all that God was creating and delighting in.

When we moved to Scott Valley in the rural and remotest part of northern California, I inherited chickens from the previous pastor. My previous experience with barnyard animals was with dogs but I found that I loved having chickens and referred to myself as a chicken farmer... in part to make my congregations laugh with me about my inexperience in country living and in part because I wanted to identify with the farmers and ranchers. For a couple of weeks that first summer the "girls" (as I called my chickens) didn't lay any eggs and I was confused about why they'd stopped. The backyard was quite big and one afternoon when I was outside I found a huge cache of eggs hidden behind a bush... of probably two dozen eggs... maybe more. Not knowing

any better at the time I threw them out because they'd been "unrefrigerated" (they don't have to be if they're still unwashed and have the natural protective coating on the shells) for I didn't know how long. Later I heard one of the chickens in the backyard, more than squawking or clucking... she was frantic, calling, searching, for her eggs. I realized at once that she was crying over the lost cache of eggs - for her children - and I grieved with her. I understood this story from Luke's gospel in a way I hadn't before. Jesus as a mother hen, grieving over His children who had moved themselves out from underneath His love and care... who didn't even want it. That year I found the picture on the front of today's bulletin to illustrate this text. This picture is a mosaic on the altar of Dominus Flevit Church on the Mt. of Olives in Jerusalem.

Sometimes it's crucial to read what surrounds a scripture lesson, to understand the landscape of the lesson. Previously Jesus had been talking with His followers about the nature of Kingdom of God when the Pharisees arrived. I wonder if they overheard His words, and if they once again felt threatened and infuriated by Jesus' insistence that discipleship is a way of life and that rule-following and outward shows of piety don't fool God. Jesus said, "Put your mind on your life with God. The way to life - to God! - is vigorous and requires your total attention. A lot of you are going to assume that you'll sit down to God's salvation banquet just because you've been hanging around the neighborhood all your lives. Well, one day you're going to be banging on the door, wanting to get in, but you'll find the door locked and the Master saying, 'Sorry, you're not on my guest list.' "You'll protest, 'But we've known you all our lives!' only to be interrupted with his abrupt, 'Your kind of knowing can hardly be called knowing. You don't know the first thing about Me.' "That's when you'll find yourselves out in the cold,

strangers to grace. You'll watch Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets march into God's kingdom. You'll watch outsiders stream in from east, west, north, and south and sit down at the table of God's kingdom. And all the time you'll be outside looking in - and wondering what happened. This is the Great Reversal: the last in line put at the head of the line, and the so-called first ending up last."

Whew. These words would have been more disturbing to the Pharisees than Jesus' lament over Jerusalem. But we don't have to worry about Jesus' words... do we? We're not Jerusalem... are we? We're not a proud and stubborn people who resist Jesus' love and protective guidance... are we? We don't just go through the motions, hang around the neighborhood of faith, without a life-saving relationship with Jesus... do we?

This is Lent. The 40 days of being tested by the devil, encountering the uncomfortable demands of the God who wants to make God's home in us; who wants to take over our lives; the 40 days of facing our false selves without giving into hopelessness and despair and without beating up or giving up on ourselves. More than a season of guilt and regret, Lent is a season of spiritual "spring cleaning."

Last week I started cleaning out the dreaded "back room" of the parsonage. The back room contains much of our daughter's college apartments... much of her growing up years... and because it's already crowded and messy I tend to throw things back there that I want out of the way. I want to give the impression that our home is one of order and beauty but the back room belies that. One of the Lenten disciplines from the postcard that's been in the bulletin for the past two weeks is to give away clothes that we don't wear... so I took a pile of them to "Nifty Thrifty" on Friday. I started making

clearing out that back room because I want space that's beautiful and useful... space I'm not embarrassed about. There's a metaphor of Lent in my uncluttering the back room. Lent is a time to empty ourselves of the things that cause us shame, the habits that undo our peace of mind, and the attitudes we have that identify us as "Jerusalem" - the city that refused the love and grace of Jesus Christ.

Lent is a time to open ourselves to grace. Grace is the undeserved favor of God; the lovingkindness God feels for you; God's gifts of mercy and forgiveness offered freely to you. If all you do in this Lenten season is to open yourself to God's grace... it is enough. And then... when you experience God's love and the peace and life-purpose that only Jesus can give you... then you can offer that love, that grace and mercy, to others. Even to your enemies. In these 40 days of Lent Jesus shows us that love is the power. It's counter-intuitive, I know. You'll never hear it from Wall Street or the White House (no offense meant to either of those institutions) but love is the ultimate power. It can change us. It defies hell and death. Love is what Lent is all about.

The Sundays in Lent don't count as part of the 40 days. Did you know that? In this intense and intentional season we need some breathing space. We need this day to remember that Jesus was human, as we are, and that He took time to eat and drink and laugh with friends. He rested, He prayed, and He used simple things like dirt and spit, and like bread and wine, to make profound connections between heaven and earth. Today I encourage you to rest and pray. Use simple things like hugging someone, or preparing a meal, or writing a letter, or taking a walk, or making love, to connect heaven and earth. Today be thankful for all of God's good gifts, given to you, for your enjoyment and refreshment. Because tomorrow the 40 days of Lent begins again, and we are

journeying with Jesus through the desert, and to the cross. After the Choir sings "*Hear Our Prayer,*" we'll enter into a time of silence, to picture Jesus as the mother hen who longs to gather us under His wings to love and care for us... and perhaps to ask ourselves why we, like Jerusalem did, resist Him. Amen.