

## **SERMON – 28 FEBRUARY 2016**

Reading: Luke 13:31–35

The text verse for the sermon is verse 34 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.”

It is only in Luke that we find this account of Jesus and the Pharisees. In all the other Gospels you only get the prophecy about Jerusalem in Matthew. In this passage some of the Pharisees came up to Jesus to warn him about Herod who wants to kill him. This Herod, of course, was Herod Antipas the one who was responsible for the death of John the Baptist and later would not stop the crucifixion of Jesus. Antipas appears in the New Testament more frequently than any other member of the Herodian dynasty—his rule coincided with the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus. The gospel writers refer to Antipas only as “Herod”—Antipas adopted this name in AD 6. The Pharisees felt threatened by Jesus’ knowledge about the law and all through the Gospels they act in opposition to Jesus. There was however one Pharisee, Nicodemus who came to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. So why “some” came to warn Him, No -one knows.

But then Jesus answers them in a very direct manner. He says: “Go and tell that fox....”. A fox was a metaphor to describe a sly, slick and deceitful crafty person. I do not think they would have dared to tell Herod what Jesus said. But Jesus made the point. There is nothing Herod can do to the set of Godly events that is going to happen. Jesus is in fact telling them and all his followers what will happen to him in the near future.

Luke very cleverly used the image of a fox and a hen in the same passage for a reason - because foxes catch hens and eat them. And Herod (along with many other people) probably thought that he was going to get rid of Jesus in a heartbeat. He was just as sly as a fox. But he didn’t keep account of God and his plans for humanity through Jesus...He did not know that God is the Almighty One who always protects His children from the foxes of this world.

Nanda read a remarkable story the other day. After a forest fire swept through the Yellowstone National Park in the USA a few years ago, a park ranger went out to survey the damage. As he walked through the woods he came across the burnt carcass of a bird huddled at the base of a tree. It didn't make sense. Why didn't this bird fly away to freedom when the fire threatened? When he nudged the carcass with his boot three chicks came scurrying out from underneath it!

Now it made sense. The hen had not flown away because that would have meant certain death for her chicks. Therefore in an act of love she stood over her chicks shielding them from the fire with her wings even though it meant a horrible death for her.

And that is exactly what Jesus did for us!

When a mother hen senses danger, she calls her chicks and they come and hide under her wings straight away. No chick will ever ignore that warning call – they always run to safety, before the fox or the fire comes.

On his journey to Jerusalem, Jerusalem that ironically means “city of peace”, Jesus walked and called people to come shelter under his wings. He opened his arms wide and offered safety to everyone he met. Sadly, In Jerusalem, lots of the chicks didn't recognize the hen and sided with the fox. But this mother hen never gave up. Jesus gave the ultimate sacrifice – his life on the cross – hanging there with his arms open wide, still offering protection to all those who believed in him.

Like the hen in the story Jesus died to save his chicks, all of us. Even the ones who sided with the fox! But that wasn't the end of him. The fox didn't win. Although he went through fire, although he walked the journey end-out like he knew he had to, God brought him back to life and decided that none of his children will ever have to face the foxes of this world on their own again.

So he sent us a different bird, a dove, his Holy Spirit, to be with us all the time. To guide us and to guard us on our journeys through life – to show us where to go and to keep us company along the way.

What Jesus did not only changed history, it changed us. He is the hen, we are the chicks.

Our journey through life isn't always easy. A journey of faith is most certainly not fun and games.

So often we are vulnerable. We can feel alone so quickly. Sometimes things happen to us that we just cannot understand, and we can so easily start falling down that slippery slope of "why me?", or "I can't cope with this"...

But this morning I want to urge you: Just don't go there! If you feel alone, abandoned, worried, devastated, hopeless – just stop for a minute. Stand still and listen – and you will hear God calling you to come, shelter under his wings.

There are very many sly foxes in our lives, but we shouldn't ever allow them to get the better of us. We should follow Jesus' example, look the fox – whatever it is – in the eye, and say: "I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day", because I'm not on this journey alone. God is with me, he has a plan for me, and he will keep me safe against the foxes and the fires.

The Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu said: "A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step." Let's take that first step today, the step towards the rest of our lives, with the heart of Jesus. We're not here to conquer, but to welcome and include.

There's lots of room under Jesus' wings, so let's move a little closer to each other, and see how absolutely amazing our journey through life can be!

Amen