

THE SECOND
SUNDAY IN
LENT

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Luke 13:31-35 2 Lent 2013
The Rev. Stephanie E. Parker

Foxes and Hens

In a match between a fox and hen, the hen seldom wins.

Herod, the vicious King who murdered his own son because he viewed him as a threat to his reign and who executed John the Baptist because he dared to speak the truth, is now after Jesus.

When Jesus hears this, he calls Herod “that fox” – not the lion which is the beast that Herod calls himself. But then Jesus compares himself to a hen, longing to gather her chicks under her wing. Foxes destroy hens. If Jesus views himself as mightier than Herod, why didn't he choose another comparison?

Why didn't he choose an animal that could defeat the fox? Jesus was a very devout man immersed in the Scriptures and the Bible gave him many other possibilities. The Book of Job tells us of the mighty horse and the Psalms the Leviathan – the great sea monster that God made for the sport of it.”

Or he could have picked the mighty eagle, a powerful image of God in Exodus. Surely an eagle could swoop down and do away with a fox. How about the leopard from Hosea? Or best of all, the lion of Judah. But, no, Jesus went with a hen, gathering her brood under her wings.¹

A hen has no weapons with which to protect herself. Her beak is not meant for fighting, she has no sharp, cutting spurs on her heels like a rooster---a rooster might take on a fox and live to tell the tale, but a hen?

A brooding hen's sole purpose is to fluff herself up and sit protectively over her chicks, and though she has no natural weapons she will fiercely put herself between her chicks and any present danger. The hen will rarely survive against a predator, but she might slake the hunger of the beast and save her chicks by her sacrifice.

Is it any wonder that the Church never embraced the mother hen as an image of God? When the storms and uncertainties of life assail us we want to hear about the Good Shepherd, or being lifted up on eagle's wings. Even the Holy Spirit descending like a dove has power and presence, but a hen? Why a hen?

As I thought on these things suddenly, without warning, an image began to rise unbidden in my mind. The image was from a 1970's television show called Kung Fu. In every episode a quiet and humble man named Kane could be found walking into the mean streets of some western frontier town.

His quiet and peaceful presence was almost immediately identified and found to be suspect by the local hooligans who had taken over leadership of the town. He would very quickly be approached to become the subject of ridicule and taunts. And as we witnessed the foul breath and spittle of the toothless townsman bathing his face in unending insults, we would see a faraway look come into his eyes.

Suddenly, we would be transported to a grassy glen where the sunlight was sparkling in the air. And we would see him in his mind's eye as a young boy walking with the old and wise Shinto priest who was his master.

We would hear the master say, “Grasshopper, what have you learned today about the way the weasel will devour the young of its enemy?”

And Grasshopper would usually reply with something like, “the weasel strikes when he feels threatened, but if you avoid the weasels territory, he will not seek you out to do you harm.”

The wise master would nod sagely, well pleased with his pupil. The grassy glen would then fade and we would rejoin our humble and quiet man as he still stood face to face with the angry, drooling, bigoted mob in front of him.

We would watch him as he made his attempt to employ the wisdom his flashback had revealed and move away from the territory of these particular human weasels.

¹ Bishop Doug Fisher

Sadly, the wisdom gained through the power of flashback seldom worked to free our quiet and humble man from the hatred and fear of those around him.

And by the end of this particular TV hour we could count on our quiet and humble man to fight fire with fire.

In apologetic and humble self-defense he would proceed to humiliate the town hoodlums, by single-handedly kicking their behinds; thus returning the town to the few good and peaceful townspeople and restoring justice to its good and proper order.

This old television show is a prime example of what is status quo in the world. If you are met with unreasonable injustice, insult, or violence you reply in kind and if you can humiliate the bad guy in the bargain, even better. We call this retributive justice and we are absolutely in love with it in our culture.

When we see the bad guy finally get it we are ecstatic---we all clap in the movies when our hero kicks some evil butt---- and there is something terribly satisfying about it I admit. And we even do it in real life which provides a pinch for those of us who follow Jesus. Just look at our response when Osama Bin Laden was finally killed. There was great rejoicing that he had at last been gunned down at high noon just how we like to see our bad guys get it. But if we are supposed to pray for our enemies are we allowed to rejoice when they are eliminated?

Because here we stand with Jesus and he is squaring off against an equally evil man and he compares himself to a mother hen...this just doesn't make much sense to us.

But in his blog Bishop Fisher of the Diocese of Western Massachusetts offers a potential window into Jesus' choice of a mother hen and he says that maybe Jesus as the mother hen is *the* perfect image for our time.

He asks us to remember the massacre at the Sandy Hook School in Newtown, Connecticut and the stories that emerged about the heroism of the teachers.

Vicki Soto, was a teacher who loved helping children learn. Her many friends spoke of her enthusiasm for life, what a good friend she was, how she loved watching the movie *The Little Mermaid*, even as an adult.

When a man with a gun entered her classroom and approached her students huddled together in a closet, she threw her body in front of them. Vicki took the bullets intended for her children and died at 27 years young.

Story after story was told of other teachers, many who survived, who draped their bodies over the little bodies of their students, protecting them from what destruction might come.

We know in our hearts that that is what ultimate love looks like. And Jesus is telling us that that is what God looks like.²

And Jesus is showing us how to create the world that God intends for us; a world of mercy and compassion and hope; a world where violence is not an invitation to more violence; a world where even the foxes are among the chicks Jesus longs to shelter and save. The Herod's can't create that world. More guns, more wars and more hate can't create that world.

But as Bishop Fischer said, the Vicki Soto's of the world can. Maybe Vicki Soto and the teachers of Sandy Hook can help us understand God better and inspire us to live out who we really are – a people created in God's image.

In a match between a fox and hen, the hen seldom wins---unless you redefine what winning means. We all know that the death of the Mother Hen at the hand of the foxes did not prove an end to the threat they felt he posed to them. In the face of the mother's hen's unbreakable love their power and their houses all came tumbling down.

Love *is* stronger than fear and violence. Like Jesus, we are called to lament the foxes of this world, not become one of them. In the on-going cosmic battle between good and evil, God still bets the farm³ on the hens. Amen.

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² Ibid.

³ Thanks to Barbara Taylor for this image.