

The Fox and the Hen

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Emmanuel Episcopal Church, West Roxbury, Massachusetts, on the Second Sunday in Lent, February 21, 2016.

How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!
Luke 13:34

Herod is an insecure man. He is feared for his strength and power, but his paranoia makes him vulnerable. His power is derived from being a tool of the Roman government, yet Herod schemes to eliminate the threat of any influence that Jesus might have. Ironically, though the Pharisees are Jesus' most vigorous detractors, they warn him about Herod. Though they look with disdain on his revolutionary ideas regarding the law, they believe that Jesus is sincere in his love for God. In warning them of Herod, Jesus refers to Herod as a crafty, prowling fox seeking to devour God's people. The image of Herod as a fox is nothing compared to the mighty works of God.

Jerusalem's destiny as the City of God is a place of unity for all people. It is where the children of Israel gather as a hen gathers her brood under her protective wing. When we take someone under our wing," we are both mentor and protector. The Holy City of Jerusalem is an intensely spiritual place where Christians, Jews and Muslims come from all over the world to honor their sacred places. There is irony in the people of Jerusalem welcoming Jesus as a hero one day only to demand his crucifixion a few days later.

Jesus' whole life is the ultimate example of self-sacrificial love. He knows that his ministry and mission will be accomplished when he reaches Jerusalem. His own destiny and the destiny of the Holy City are bound together. As the prophets were persecuted in Jerusalem before him, Jesus knows that he will have to face his own persecution. His rejection, like that of the prophets, is necessary for his mission to save the people and faith of the nation of Israel.

There are those who say Christianity is for losers. The truth of that is that we gain by losing. When we are willing to lose our selves in service to others we gain a greater sense of meaning and purpose. When we repent of our sins and are forgiven, we lose our guilt and gain wholeness. The Christian faith is far more than following a set of rules of good conduct. Being a Christian in today's world means living by clear standards. It means not blaming God when things go wrong. It means gathering here for worship each week as a priority rather than an option. It means working out a respectful relationship with all people, whether or not we like them. It means not killing anyone's spirit or reputation by anger and gossip. It means being faithful and trustful in all relationships, particularly in marriage. It is being honest and fair in our dealings and not claiming for our selves what belongs to others. It is having the integrity to tell the truth and not mislead others by our silence. It is being content with what we have and not being jealous or envious of the good fortune of others. If this seems to be demanding, it is. We stand with those who live on the margins: the poor, the homeless and the voiceless. As long as bigotry, prejudice, racism, sexism, xenophobia and homophobia continue, there are no exceptions to those who are welcome here at God's table.

As Abraham and Sarah were promised that their descendents would inherit the land, so God has a promise to be faithful to us. During this Lenten season we renew our promise to live out our covenant with God so that what we do and say here on Sunday has everything to do with what we do and say during the week at home and in the workplace.

Jesus was condemned to die after a mock trial that was a travesty of justice. He took the place of a notorious criminal who was set free. He did not on a cross between two candles in a beautifully appointed gothic church. Instead, he was hung on a crude wooden cross between two thieves on a hill outside of a city so diverse that the sign over him was in three different languages: Latin, Greek and Hebrew. He was a victim of mob violence in a place where thieves curse and soldiers gamble. That is where he died and they were the people for whom he died.

Being a citizen of the kingdom of God requires more than just belonging to a church. It means being called from the comfortable pew to active service in a life of sacrifice for the sake of others. What good we do may go without recognition or reward, but God always knows and God is the only one who needs to know. Taking our faith seriously means demonstrating better behavior than being passive aggressive, rude, overbearing or abusive. It means standing for what is right and being will-

ing to take the consequences. It means not trying to please everyone because we can't and shouldn't try. We must please God first and if that upsets others, then so be it. Taking our faith seriously sometimes means being reviled and rejected for taking an unpopular stand. It means being unafraid to risk doing the right thing for the right reason.

If you are looking for a faith that is soothing, painless, and convenient, you're in the wrong place. But if you are looking for a working faith that demands commitment to transforming your life, this is the place for you. Never compromise yourself by looking for shortcuts or painless alternatives. Do not think that it isn't important to be part of the church to be a Christian. With all our faults and shortcomings, the church is still the best place to learn how to be a Christ to our neighbor. It is still the best way to grow in understanding what it means to be a Christina.

Our presiding Bishop Michael Curry invites us to be part of the "Jesus movement." Being gathered under Jesus as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, we have no greater assurance that we're in good hands. I promise you!