

My New Superhero

Rev. Catherine Oxenford-Grant , March 16, 2025 - Lent II

Wall Street United Church

Luke 13: 31-35 – Jesus’ Lament over Jerusalem

“Herod wants to kill you!” Jesus replied, “Go tell that fox, ‘I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow!’

Jerusalem...how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks...”

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Please pray with me: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing to you O God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of us all. Amen.

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In February 2013, there was absolute horror in the news, when a story was reported about how a fox stole into a house in South London, England and attacked a 4 week-old baby. Apparently, the fox pulled the baby out of its cot and in the struggle inflicted some very serious injuries to the baby’s hand. The child’s mother was the hero of the day, kicking and screaming at the animal until it retreated. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was quick to reassure people that fox attacks on humans were very rare. Nevertheless, the family and local community were left deeply shocked and upset by the incident.

Those of us who have read Aesop’s Fables are aware of just how clever a real fox is. So when Jesus labeled Herod “*that fox*” in Luke 13 verse 32, he obviously wasn’t just referring to the cunning qualities of the animal. No doubt he was referring to the ruthless or even the vicious acts that foxes are capable of. So, when Jesus comes up against the fox, what does he become? No, no, not that....wait for it...He becomes a

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chicken!!...good for eggs, good for dinner...but up against a fox, who is agile, quick, and smart, I wonder.

By this time in Jesus' ministry, I am convinced that he can be and/or become anything he wanted to be...so, why, of all the animals in the animal kingdom, did Jesus choose to put a hen up against a fox?

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Barbara Brown Taylor explores this question in her article "[As a Hen Gathers Her Brood.](#)"

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.**

There is a small chapel situated on the slopes of the Mount of Olives called Domunis Flevit. This is supposed to be the place where Jesus wept over Jerusalem. The current chapel was constructed in the 1950's, built in the shape of a teardrop, and it has a magnificent view over the Temple Mount of Jerusalem. On the altar is a mosaic that is said to date from the 7th century, a mosaic of a hen and her chicks, with the words from Luke 13 around its edge. In the mosaic the hen has its wings spread wide to protect its chicks. Naturally, spreading wings wide puffs the chest out, making the hen appear so vulnerable.

And that is the way of Jesus. Time and time again he turns every single one of our ideas and conceptions about him upside down. Which will

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he choose? Lion or hen? First or last? Vulnerable or victorious? Throne or cross? He surprises us every time.

Barbara Brown Taylor concludes her article with these words:

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Jesus won't be king of the jungle in this or any other story. What he will be 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.

And that's the amazing God who has claimed us. The amazing God who laid down his life for us. The amazing God who told Herod: *"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."* He doesn't allow anything to distract him from his tasks, divert him from his aims, but teaching, serving and giving...teaching, serving and giving — all of himself, over and over again.

To tell the truth, I never expected to find myself inspired by a chicken — but it seems, with Jesus in the mix, the sky is not falling. I wonder if perhaps it's time to change our concept of the superhero — not Goliath, but David, the young shepherd with the sling-shot; not a lion, but Daniel, the prophet in the furnace; not the conqueror of Rome, but the traveling Rabbi, with no home or possessions to call his own...and certainly not a 'super chicken', no...only a brooding hen with her wings outstretched, willing to be vulnerable and ready to shelter her chicks.

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I have never really thought about the church as a mother hen, but I do now. Think of our church as a big fluffed up hen, offering warmth and shelter to all kinds of chicks...orphans, the homeless, the despairing, the runts of the litter and all the rest. We can be a church that plants herself between the foxes of this world and the fragile-boned chicks. We can refuse to run from the foxes of this world...the doubters, the troubles, the pandemics, the pain, the grief, the utter chaos of this world...We can be, with God's help, a real opportunity for courage. We come to church to be fed and sheltered, and be a church where we stand firm with those in this world who need the same things from us. We grow, by giving what we have received, by teaching what we have learned, and most importantly, by loving the way we ourselves have been loved — by a mother hen who would give up his life to gather us under his wings.ⁱ

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I feel safer already.

Thanks be to God. Please pray with me.

Loving God, help us to receive the wisdom in your willingness to be vulnerable and know that we might do the same. Help us to be alive to your Spirit and safe under your outstretched wings. Amen.

ⁱ Barbara Brown Taylor. Bread of Angels. Chickens and Foxes, (Cowley Publications Ltd, 2013).