



Trinity UMC Iron Mountain March 13, 2022
Rev. Pastor Geri

Context for Scripture Just to set the stage for our Scripture this a.m....Jesus moves quickly from surviving the temptation in the wilderness with the devil into the early part of his ministry...Travelling through the Galilee, which is pretty far North of Jerusalem. Part of the ancient Northern Kingdom. He's going from place to place, proclaiming the good news of God's power and presence in the world. (8:1) He's healing and feeding and teaching and amazing those who follow him, the disciples and the crowds.

He doesn't use a marketing dept. No fliers or letters or bill boards. He trusts the grapevine and the word of mouth-to- mouth news of his mission to get passed from person to person, village to village, synagogue to synagogue. And what was that mission? He's very clear as early as Chapter 4:43: Jesus said to them, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose."

Today we move with Jesus out of that early phase of his ministry into the time when he was travelling to Jerusalem. Chapter 9:51 tells us that Jesus 'Set his face to go to Jerusalem.' And his reputation from his time spent in the Galilee preceded him and the people came out to greet him as 'he went through one town and village after another, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem (13:22). Hear what happens in 13:31 – 35.

Gospel Reading Luke 13: 31-35 NRSV

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "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 'not fitting that that a prophet be destroyed outside of Jerusalem/ impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.'

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired 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.'"

A Word of God that is still speaking,
Thanks be to God.

Thoughts about an Imperfect Life and Faith--Sermon

"So much is out of our control."

This morning I want to make 3 points about this reading and then tell you a story about foxes and chickens that fell into my lap recently. So here we go. Point #1:

1. *At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."*

First point: The Pharisees were a specific religious group in the time of Jesus. They were the small town, rural leadership of the sons and daughters of Abraham and Sarah...those who had been rescued from slavery in Egypt by Moses. The Pharisees affirmed a belief in an afterlife, made strenuous ethical demands on their followers, and were critical of the leaders in Jerusalem. In other words, they were a lot like Jesus. Or maybe it's Jesus who was a lot like them.ⁱⁱ

Yes, a time will come when Jesus has some harsh words to say about the Pharisees. And they eventually are not happy with Jesus. The Pharisees have their part to play in the Crucifixion of Jesus but at this point in his ministry...travelling to Jerusalem after an extended tour of the Galilee...the Pharisees are the ones who really did offer him suggestions to help protect him from Herod. That's a happy Surprise for Jesus and for us...ⁱⁱⁱ We may have come to think of the Pharisees as the Bad Guys who were against Jesus. I saw the 'Passion of Christ' movie Friday night with the Quinnesec UMC group and that movie sure makes that point double time. But the reality of the Pharisees trying to save Jesus' life in **this** reading is not to be lost in their later mis-judgments and even cruelty to Jesus.

The point being...that our temptation may be to broad-stroke paint any one group or person as all bad...That is a common reaction to chaos and uncertainty and a feeling of being out of control. Find someone or some group or something to blame and you'll feel better? Maybe for a moment but life and humanity and society is so much more complex than that. Our challenge is to let go of overly simple explanations and trust God while we swim in an ocean of complexity. Good and bad live side by side in everyone. And we can't control that by stereotyping people into a one-dimensional category.

2. *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 'not fitting that that a prophet be destroyed outside of Jerusalem'^{iv}/ impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.'*

Second point: Jesus is giving us a lesson in **persistence**. Calling Herod a fox is Jesus' way of describing an unscrupulous, multi-generational, dysfunctional power person. Jesus knew in real life about Herod's father who killed the toddlers in Bethlehem while Jesus and Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt. Jesus knew from the Old Testament that there were problems with kings and pharaohs and emperors and Caesars. God had warned the people of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that kings would be trouble and Jesus learned that lesson at his mother's knee.

We know that too. There has been and always will be tyrants. We are living that reality today in a variety of ways but the most pressing situation for many of us is...from a distance as we watch the Russian invasion/war on Ukraine. We are witnessing the ripple effects of today's foxes and lions and tigers and bears, oh my, throughout the world. We are all affected by what is going on, and I'm not just talking about gas prices. It doesn't matter where War happens...we are all in this together. We can't stop it. We didn't start it. We don't have the power to control it. So what do we do?

Well, Jesus demonstrated his **persistence** when he says to the Pharisees...Go tell that fox that I am about my Father's business. Jesus knows his mission and is not going to run from it...he **will** continue his journey to Jerusalem. He **will** continue to drive out demons, cure the sick and demonstrate with his words and actions the love and the power of God to all who take the time to watch and notice.

Through our baptismal vows, persistence in the face of evil is God's intention for us even now. No, we can't control the powers of this world but we can take steps to continue to do the good that God would have us do in the places where we live.

We may feel powerless but we are not...

we may feel deterred by the forces that seem to control the world...

We may want to defer and hide from it all...

we may choose a detour at times, around the conflicts and ugliness but no matter how powerless we may feel...

God is persistently with us and every smile, every kind word, every effort on your part to love those who annoy you, every bit of energy you give to forgiving those who you call enemies...that is **your** persistence and faithfulness. Just like Jesus...taking that road to Jerusalem, no matter what. Which brings me to my third point.

3. *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired 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.'*

So what about Jerusalem? Jesus loved Jerusalem. Remember how Mary and Joseph took him to the Temple in Jerusalem at 40 days old to be dedicated? Anna and Simeon blessed him and spoke with Mary. Remember how his family, his whole community travelled to Jerusalem every year and when he was 12 years old...he sat with the teachers, the Pharisees even perhaps in the Temple and his parents couldn't find him?

Jerusalem is not a theory to Jesus. It's a beloved place and yet...Jesus knew the history. Jesus knew the darkness in the hearts of even the highest titled people in the Temple. Jesus knew the oppressive and merciless power of the Roman government and the men who served Caesar.

Jesus knew that imperfect people form imperfect cities and governments and churches. Jesus knew that Jerusalem is the city where prophets go to die.

And yet, these words of Jesus tell us that he did not hate or despair or want to destroy Jerusalem.

No, Jesus, wanted to protect and defend the city of Jerusalem in spite of all the evil, the selfishness, the corruption and the cruelty. He wanted to gather the people of Jerusalem as a mother hen gathers her children...under the shelter of her wings.

In spite of the fact that foxes attack mother hens just as much as chicks.

Still Jesus moves onward, wishing that Jerusalem would allow itself to be loved and transformed into the kingdom of God, as God intends—as a people who would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and bring a light to the nations.

We, as the followers of Jesus are called to tend to the Jerusalems of our day. To show love and care and forgiveness to our cities and governmental leaders and our states and nation and yes, also to our neighbors and our church. Because:

Foxes are all around us too. And...

Imperfection IS the human condition.

Jesus came to assure us that in spite of our imperfection, in spite of forces that are far beyond our control, God still wants us to fully and persistently participate in the life which we have been given. In all of its brokenness. In all of our powerlessness. In all of the beauty and horror of life...We need not be afraid. God is with us. And we may not be able to control it all, but we can endure it with persistence and each do our part. We can live lives of **holy imperfection** and persistence as we learn the lessons Jesus teaches and accept the gifts of the Spirit that God offers.

And that's what the story this morning is about. A story about foxes and chickens. A story about human imperfection and circumstances that could have been controlled but weren't and of forces that are beyond our control and then what happened.

WE CALLED IT the Memorial Day Massacre. My fiancé and I had owned the farm for only a few months, and we had fallen asleep watching a movie and failed to shut the door to the chicken coop—even knowing that foxes were scouring the nighttime neighborhood.

Sure enough, come morning there were chicken carcasses everywhere and a couple of traumatized survivors who would never lay an egg again. We started the grim task of rounding up the mauled dead and some who seemed to have died of pure fright. The trash bins filled up with bodies. We felt awful.

Since it was a holiday week, trash pickup was delayed until Saturday. Problem was, our wedding was taking place at the farm on Friday, with a reception on Saturday. By Wednesday the warm weather had ripened the

carcasses, and vultures had started circling. As you can imagine, carrion feeders were not part of my wedding theme.

On Friday, to spare our guests the grim reality of farm life, we stowed the offensive bins in the barn. The wedding went well, even though the skies opened up just as the ceremony was starting. Thankfully my fiancé had made a last-minute decision to move the wedding indoors. I was encouraged by the thought that I had found the right man to marry—a man who knew how to watch the weather. We went to bed that night full of joy and a little too much wine.

Just before sunrise my new husband sat straight up in bed and exclaimed, “Trash!” Drowsily I wondered why he was calling me that. Then I heard the garbage truck on the next road over. We leapt out of bed and bolted for the barn.

We got the garbage bins to the curb just in time. Panting, we looked at each other and laughed. “How’s that for a wedding night?” he asked.

They say to “begin as you mean to go on,” and that’s what we did. Over the last twenty years we’ve faced disasters with **humor**, challenges with **cooperation**, and mistakes with **forgiveness**. We’ve made some wonderful memories. All the rest is just trash to be taken to the curb.^v

Those of you who have been married know that marriage is more than just a wedding and reception. This story gives us a prescription not just for an enduring marriage but for life itself. With humor, with cooperation and with forgiveness, we can face our powerlessness and loss of control. Those are the ingredients of persistent love and holy living. Let go and let God fill you with all you need to laugh at disaster, partner with others through chaos and forgive always those who will be amazed at your grace-filled reaction to their imperfections. Let us pray.

Dear God, our powerlessness can feel like a prison from which there is no escape.

But we know that you, o Holy and gracious One, are with us.

So give us the strength to let go of the fear.

Show us how to give up on unrealistic expectations of ourselves & others.

We remember that you have given us all we need for this day.

In our weakness and confusion, we can still offer kindness, respect, love
and that is enough. Amen.

ⁱ Swanson, Richard 1, Provoking the Gospel of Luke, Pilgrim Press, Cleveland, 2006, pp. 305- 306 translation of Gospel.

ⁱⁱ Tripp Homebrewed Christianity .pdf p. 31

ⁱⁱⁱ Swanson, op cit, p.121.

^{iv} Ibid. p. 121.

^v ‘The Sun’ Chapel Hill, NC, Jan. 2022, Issue 553, Lorisa Stombaugh, Coatesville, Pennsylvania, p. 39.