

Second Sunday in Lent 2019
Church of the Advent
March 17, 2019

Jesus the Broody Hen

How often have you heard someone say--or found yourself thinking--figuratively at least-- *I'm gonna kill him?* Of course, its not meant literally, and is ironically far from an expression of intended violence, but it is not an uncommon--though granted unhealthy--expression of frustration, anger, or exasperation at someone who managed to make your life difficult, or just got on your last nerve, whether they intended to or not. The customer service person who kept repeating the same unhelpful information in the same snippy tone that does not address the issue for which you need customer service. The teenager who came in two hours past curfew and hadn't been answering their phone. The boss who ignored your ideas and then used them, taking the credit.

Generally speaking, I dare to say that there are not many people in the world who have never had their will thwarted by others. It would be a rare and holy thing to come across a saint exempt from bristling over the obstructive nature of others who simply refuse to see things their way! One never enjoys being the *object* of such disappointment and disdain--and I would bet we have all been there, too--and though the anger of others towards us *rarely* feels justified, it would be hard to claim we've been exempt from taking our turn at stirring the tempest in our own teapots.

The irony of our gospel today is that Jesus is the object of frustration here. *Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.* What an interesting opening line to a story from the Bible. Is it a real warning for Jesus to save his skin, or is it rather meant to be taunting, teasing, challenging trash talk from the Pharisees to see if Jesus was aware of his effect on the authorities of their time? I imagine them saying, *better watch out, cause you are annoying the wrong people and they just might do something about it.* Did they think Herod was actually plotting the death of Jesus, or had they just recently seen him in a temper tantrum and were just passing along the bad news that Jesus was on Herod's radar, and not in a good way?

Herod was a regional ruler who did not have ultimate control over his own kingdom while the Roman Empire was the occupying power, but he was allowed to keep his position as long as he kept his own people in line, and he did not need any competition or trouble-makers. He had clearly been worried about Jesus since he first heard rumors of his birth from the Wise Men, so worried that he had been willing at the time to order all male infants in the land killed to eliminate the talk of a Messiah and a new kingdom. Herod had also recently ordered the beheading of John the Baptist, so his potential for violence was real. Yet if he got rid of Jesus, he might have to contend with a popular backlash, an uprising even. How would he get away with killing the one who healed sickness and banished demons, the one the crowds followed around? How frustrating would it have been for Herod to watch this unknown Galilean carpenter grabbing so much attention while teaching people that their obedience to worldly authorities should be secondary their allegiance to God?

Even more interesting in this story is the response of Jesus to the news that Herod was out to get him. *Tell that fox* I'm busy right now, but pretty soon I will be heading his way, and then he can do what he has to do--in Jerusalem. Jesus did not express fear, or anxiety or anger at their comments; and he did not shoot the messengers. Instead he expressed sadness and compassion--for the way the world was, and for how the fear, anxiety and anger in its authorities that always seemed to lead down paths of destruction. In the same breath that Jesus acknowledged Jerusalem as the center of a culture that killed its prophets and stoned those God sent to the people, he lamented that her inhabitants seemed to be lost, as if following the wrong signs, listening to the wrong voices, making the wrong decisions not in their best interests.

Jesus then took upon himself the image of a broody hen, longing to spread her wings to make room for scattered helpless chicks, to hold them close under her wings, offering warmth and comfort and safety. A broody hen runs on an internal program created uniquely for chickens. After some mysterious trigger, and usually about a week after a date with a rooster, she begins to sit with undistracted determination on a nest of made up of a pile of her own eggs--and sometimes eggs abandoned by other hens. Barely taking time to eat or drink, she will keep these eggs warm non-stop around the clock for exactly 21 days, when they will begin to hatch. Then after the chicks are running around, she teaches them how to eat and drink and creates safe

space for them under her wings, hiding them from predators and shielding them from cold. All the other regular laying hens are the ones whose daily offerings are combined in those dozens we buy at the grocery store or farmer's market; a broody hen becomes a chicken altogether different, responsible for the perpetuation of the species.

By taking on the nature of a broody hen, Jesus did not dismiss those who hated him as much as express his longing to gather them to himself and heal their brokenness. He was mourning the failures of the Jerusalem leadership, who in spite of the centrality of the Jerusalem Temple built to keep their relationship with God foremost in their lives, had strayed from God's purposes. Jesus knew that in their rejection of him they were rejecting the one who sent him; in their disregard for the suffering and oppression of those exploited to maintain their wealth and power, they were disregarding their chance for liberation and redemption. And he felt bad for them, because he loved them, too--just as he loved the sick and blind, the lame and the poor he placed his hands upon every day. He loved them, even though he knew he would meet them in Jerusalem, and they would play their part--actively or passively--in his coming death. That fox would eventually find his way into the henhouse, and even the loving and courageous broody hen would be no match for his cunning and determination, at least in this world.

But the story does not end with the sacrifice of a broody hen offering her life for her chicks. Because we are Jesus people, and because we are resurrection people, we know that our story does not end in death, no matter how smart or determined or threatening the fox. We know that faithfulness and compassion redeem fear, anxiety, anger, and even our exasperation with one another. The promise of our God to love us is as old as the promise made to Abraham, whose offspring were as numerous as the stars. And we know that the love of God can redeem all things, even our careless claim to want to *kill* someone, even the tempest in our teapots. The sacrifice our broody hen Jesus has already made, to face the worst men can do sacrificially and courageously, and then to share with us his power over the grave, has already proven everything we need to know to for us to bring healing in any way we can to the still-broken world. Perhaps this strange lesson from Jesus will remind me the next time I find myself saying I want to *kill* someone, I might try substituting the words *forgive* or *accept*, or *help*, or *heal* or *love*, to see if they work just as well or better, to diffuse the frustration rather than exacerbate it. At the very

least it couldn't hurt to try. Then instead of stirring up that tempest in a tea pot, I can just make some tea and move on. Amen.

