

SERMONS FROM ST. FRANCIS

March 4, 2007 –

Text: Luke 13:31-35

Pr. Robert Goldstein

“ Foxes and Hens ”

We are having some really lovely sunny days; days which can lull us into thinking that spring is here. But a cold blast of wind and pouring rain knocks us back into reality. Winter's still here.

And that's just where the Gospel lesson is this morning. The warm promising prospects of Jesus' success in the countryside meet the harsh realities of city life and city power.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

This is a bitterly cold text. It is an unhappy text. It is an anguished text –words stung by the wintry winds of cold urban reality –the cold urban reality of living the promise of Abraham in a world that couldn't care less.

And that contemptuous “couldn't care less” is sharpened by some Pharisees who warn Jesus that Herod wants to kill him. The chilling word is out. A death threat is on your head Jesus.

How many times did Martin Luther King enter a city whose powers couldn't care less what he lived for? How many times were death threats delivered to his hotel door and to his Atlanta home? The ethical life, the prophetic life is lonely, cold, numbingly cold. All you have are words, just words, the promise of Abraham; the promise of Jesus bringing blessing upon the world, upon the cities.

But the cities are the gathering places of the ambitious who couldn't care less about the vision of Abraham or Jesus' words. Life is very short, cold and hard. Money, power, fame is the name of their game. Welcome to the City!

Jesus calls Herod “that fox.” More wintry words. Tell that fox, Jesus says, that chief of all opportunists, that he's meeting a mother hen. So prophetically apt. For that fox will get into the hen house and slaughter the hen, bringing chaos and destruction. While the fox couldn't care less what happens to the hen, the hen lovingly gathers her brood under her wings. The fox will kill the hen but the chicks will scatter –traumatized at first, but determined to carry on the value of their mother's love to wherever they escape. Cruel winter of human hubris meets the warm hearts of orphaned chicks; chicks who will remember why their mother died for them. The power in humble weakness and the weakness of arrogant power. Foxes and hens.

This church is a little red hen sitting in the midst of the many foxes in this city. This little red brick church has sheltered many a brood under her wings –from the children of this

congregation who have passed through confirmation, to the support groups who meet under her wings to fend off their foxes; from the motley hungry who receive the warmth of a nourishing meal, to us who gather in this sanctuary to hear the Word of God, to be reminded again of Abraham's vision and Jesus' life, death and resurrection. We are chicks that this mother hen church gathers under her wings into her warmth and protection from the foxes of this world.

There is a redemptive nature to sacred spaces. Yet it is not quite the space, this space, the church building, but the presence of the Christ in this space, made present by the spoken Word of God, made present by the visible bread and wine, made present in our being forgiven, made present as we forgive others, made present by long memories.

We are some of the chicks. But we also have been foxes. Lent is time to contemplate the chick and fox in all of us. Lent is the season to prepare our hearts for the mother hen to return and take us under her wings, into the warmth and safety of her maternal love.

Thank you for being mother hen to me during my period of loss and mourning over my mother. Your outpouring of compassion, condolence and caring made the unbearable more bearable. I thank you for being Christ to me. Such acts of love, outfox the pain and the despair such losses can bring. These acts of love are reduplicating the sweep of the mother hen's wings bringing this little chick under her tender warmth and protection.

But there is one thing more. Herod the fox and Jesus the mother hen reveal a deeper reality of the struggle between good and evil in our world. That fox not only threatened that hen. That fox attacked her and killed her. As a church, this little red church across from Safeway, we are called also to risk our existence for the chicks God places under our care.

From Jesus' death came a newer vision, a new expression of Abraham's vision, that did not supplant the Jewish vision, but complemented it. We are heirs to that new vision and as heirs are we prepared to be vulnerable as a community of God's people in the city –a mother hen? Vulnerable for the promise of new life in our city. Foxes and hens. Foxes rule by fame, power and fear. Hens rule by sacrificial love. Bring out that hen in you, in us. Amen

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