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A Hen in the Midst of Foxes

I have heard how it moves you. For many of you, volunteering at the Harmony Food Pantry is a highlight of your week. It draws you out of yourself, and into a wider embrace of this world. Your arms, like your heart, expand as you encounter those whose life experience is unfamiliar. I'm grateful that you bring back what you experience and share it with the rest of us.

This past year, as the food pantry has served more of our new neighbors from places like Venezuela, you have told me about the strong women- the mothers who show up week after week. They come early, stand in line, carry children in their arms, all while also carrying backpacks and boxes of food. Risky, courageous, loving, protective, nourishing, powerful, fierce. Their arms hold so much.

On the heels of his time in the wilderness, Jesus is busy doing the work that God has given him to do. His mission is clear. No time for distractions. He knows who he is and to whom he belongs and that makes all the difference. The Pharisees come with a warning about Herod wanting to kill him. Jesus is prepared. He sees it as an opportunity to articulate exactly what he is up to. "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 impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' In other words, I know where all of this leads.

No prophet can be killed outside of Jerusalem. Jesus is more than a prophet, and he must head straight there. In this second week of our Lenten pilgrimage we see our destination up ahead.

While he is on his way he cannot help but lament. When he thinks of Jerusalem, love swells within him. He grieves. Cries out. In Jerusalem, as in so many places where rulers reside, profit and power conspire against people. The vulnerable are scattered and those who confront them are silenced. The truth becomes the enemy. It makes people feel like strangers in their own land. Eventually everyone looks somewhere for wisdom. consolation. A place to discover resilience and resist. Something more. Deeper. Lasting. Jesus desires to gather the lost and forgotten ones. Welcome those left behind. Give rest to the weary. To be a dwelling for those in need. You and me included. In a world where foxes like Herods are a dime a dozen and deceptive dens dot the landscape, Jesus is a mother hen. "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" As Barbara's Brown Taylor says, "if you've ever loved someone you couldn't protect you understand the depth of Jesus'

ache. All you can do is open your arms. You cannot make anyone walk into them. Meanwhile, this is the most vulnerable posture in the world --wings spread, breast exposed -- but if you mean what you say, then this is how you stand.”¹

She continues, “Given the number of animals available, it is curious that Jesus chooses a hen. What about the eagle of Exodus, or Hosea’s leopard? What about the lion of Judah, mowing down his enemies with a roar? Compared to any of those, a mother hen does not inspire much confidence. No wonder some of the chicks decided to go with the fox. A hen is what Jesus chooses. He is always turning things upside down, so that children and peasants wind up on top while kings and scholars land on the bottom. He is always wrecking our expectations of how things should turn out by giving prizes to losers and paying the last first. So of course he chooses a chicken, which is about as far from a fox as you can get. You can live by licking your chops or you can die protecting the chicks.”

Down the road, it all becomes clear. Jesus will die. Arms outstretched. Wings spread wide open. “The most vulnerable position in the world, but if you mean what you say, this is how you stand.” Putting his own body between sin and death and anything that would prevent him from bringing all creation into that embrace.

On the third day he finishes his work. The Mother Hen rises from the dead and does not leave us alone. He is still searching, inviting, and gathering all the lost ones until no one is left out. Even giving his body and blood as nourishment. Arms still open. We can bring the dying and abandoned places within us into that embrace. There- resurrection is possible. No shame. No fear. It all belongs.

At our post-worship conversation Wednesday night someone shared that, in these times, it is important for us to be here. We long to be gathered, sheltered. As children of The Mother Hen- we take up that posture. Cruciform. Arms open. Empty handed we can shelter others, support refugee one and give our time to Beyond Hunger like youth from Grace and United did yesterday, and receive from others too.

There is an icon of the cross in the Basilica of St. Clemente. It’s the cross with birds, (we might say chicks), resting in it. Could be an icon of our lives. There we know that no fox or their schemes can pull us or anyone else out of this ever expanding love in life or in any death.

The Mother Hen will always be there. Risky, courageous, loving, protective, nourishing, powerful, fierce. God, for you. Holding you, all the way. If you mean what you say this is how you stand. And he does.

¹ Here is the article by Barbara Brown Taylor that I quote from throughout:
<https://www.religion-online.org/article/as-a-hen-gathers-her-brood/>

