

## Foxes and Hens and the Holy House of God• Luke 13:31-35, Lent II, 02/28/10

Jesus had some friends among the Pharisees who warned him that Herod wanted to get rid of him. Jesus is undaunted by the news that Herod wants to get rid of him. His ‘Go tell that fox...’ suggests Jesus was so filled with the Spirit - the divine energy of his mission - that nothing was going to stand in the way. He seems armed with a unrequited determination to face his destiny in Jerusalem, the holiest city in the world, and there to proclaim God’s new time had arrived. A ‘fox’, a cunning ruler, will not stand in the way.

If you can love a ‘place,’ Jerusalem was Jesus’ first love. It was a human sphere God entered in an archetypal way. Jerusalem isn’t just one geographical place – it is everywhere God and humans might meet. This Jerusalem, the city Jesus viewed broke the hearts of many prophets and spiritual teacher, killing man. And it could not sustain Jesus’ life and teachings. Within its boundaries was the Temple - a monolith for many faiths and yet it was a place of continuing violence. What’s in a name? It reminds me of Philadelphia, PA. The word means ‘brotherly love’ and laughable that seems to many.

Spirit work always threatens the status quo. The word ‘status quo’ means the ‘state of the way things are.’ The late Mother Theresa was not a powerful person and was admired by countless, but she was not an ally of the ‘status quo.’ Neither was Jesus an insurrectionist, yet he upset the status quo. He confronted the world to change (repent) turn around, so that it could first see itself loved by its Creator and secondly that it could see the world loved by the Creator. To see that way requires ‘spirit work.’

Spirit or soul work is such uncharted territory for many. And yet to neglect our spirits is often the source of our greatest woes. There’s an old saying in Hindu Scripture: *“To that man who thinks he’s wise and denies the Spirit, the Spirit becomes terror itself.”* ‘Soul work’ is the hardest work we will ever do. It moves our reality from the head to the heart, our longest journey in life. Jesus sought to open peoples’ hearts to the reality of God. And for that he would die, accused of sedition at his trial accused of attempting to overthrow the government. The saying goes: *It’s easier to kill the messenger than hear the message.*

Sometimes ‘religion is easier to digest than spirituality. Someone once said to me: “Give me rules and regulations and something to do, but don’t invite me on some path toward an invisible deity. That’s like asking me to become a brain surgeon.” Code phrases like ‘Are you saved?...’ ‘Do you know Christ?’... ‘Is Jesus your personal Savior?’ are easier to say than do. It’s easier to talk ‘religion’ than to walk faith. My faith talk works best when I bump into living it. God is working things in my life from the inside out... and if I never go inside, what shapes my outside world?

Herod the ‘Fox’ represented a world that seemed counter-spiritual, soul-less. His was a culture of power and gratification and self-serving. And isn’t that our culture? It’s what you and I know daily. It’s a world that often ends up full of fear and abuse. Jesus’ world was soulful. He was the ‘Hen;’ his nature was nurture; his mission was to be motherly with us... to protect us and sustain us. And his wings are metaphorically ‘spiritual wings’ protecting with teaching, all for revealing the heart of the Holy God. The wrongs of this

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world are rooted in peoples' distorted beliefs and self-serving ideas. Jesus' faith was lived in serving, not being served.

My third visit to Jerusalem in 1993 included a visit to a small chapel on the western slopes of the Mount of Olives called *Dominus Flevit*. The name means 'The Lord Wept.' Tradition has it that it was here Jesus wept over Jerusalem. Below it's altar, our guide pointed to a mosaic medallion of a white hen with a golden halo around her head. Her red comb resembles a crown and her wings are spread wide to shelter the pale yellow chicks that crowd around her feet. They look happy to be there. And the hen is ready to spit fire should anyone harm her chicks.

It never happened, of course. The words printed in Latin that circle the mosaic are those Jesus laments through his tears. "*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings. And you were not willing.*" Those last five words are the most haunting.<sup>1</sup>

If you have ever loved someone you could not protect, you understand. Through Jesus' tears I imagine the heart of God weeping for all of us. The Gospel invites us to be protected by God's spirit in this world. We need not be like chicks resisting to go with the fox rather than seek the loving protection of the hen. The imagery, of course, is spiritual and metaphorical –but you get the idea. In the world, our souls are up for grabs like the fledging Christians Paul knew in Philippi. The Good News is that Jesus chose to remain the hen and to stand between the chicks and the snarling fox. It's not a pretty story. But then, Divine Love is always messy in a world controlled by foxes. Lent is time for the soul, to ask the deeper questions of 'who we are and whose we are.' It is also a time to be amazed at the breadth and depth of God's love at loose in the world paving the way toward an Easter triumph. Amen

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<sup>1</sup>Borrowed from a similar reference by Barbara Brown Taylor, 'The Christian Century' recalling her visit to Jerusalem.