

## **March 17, 2019 Second Sunday in Lent**

Pastor Carolyn Albert Donovan

Peace Lutheran Church – Austin, Texas

### **GOSPEL**

**Luke 13:31-35**

The holy gospel according to Saint Luke, the thirteenth chapter.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

<sup>31</sup>At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to [Jesus,] “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” <sup>32</sup>He 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. <sup>33</sup>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.’ <sup>34</sup>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! <sup>35</sup>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.’ ”

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

There’s a fox in the hen house, so they say.

Isn’t there always? Isn’t there always a crafty predator somewhere sneaking in between gentle sleeping birds...looking for a quick pre-packaged meal?

There’s a fox in the hen house.

And when there’s a fox in the hen house, we know who is bound to come out the worse off. With feathers flying...a furry, four-legged, sharp-toothed critter is leaving well-fed, blood dripping from his jaws.

It’s as true now as it’s always been. And it isn’t actually funny at all when we think of how true it is.

There is a fox in the hen house...but the thing is...today, Jesus is siding with the hens.

There is no shortage of foxes roaming the world...looking for someone to devour. On Friday, a predator snuck in among gentle, praying people in New Zealand murdering 50 and wounding 50 more. Every day, men and women of all ages, and young children are

trapped, tricked, or sold into the slavery of our era...what we call human trafficking...but should really probably call slavery...so the long heritage of its evil can't hide under a new name.

Sometimes this seems like the unavoidable shape of things. There will always be foxes...There will always be hens. It seems inevitable that someone will be devoured...either by xenophobia, racism, and white supremacy...or by an economic machine that crushes the most vulnerable in its gears...or by the more silent but still suffocating indifference of the comfort that allows those of us with more than enough to forget the urgency of those with far too little.

Can anything really change?

How silly and naive are the beauty queens who wish for world peace?

But one of the most powerful in the arsenal of lies told by the powers that devour lives and love and hope is that they are simply a part of the furniture of the universe, nothing to be done about it.

Yes...there's a fox in the hen house...but Jesus is on the side of the hens. Jesus is about to do some cosmic redecorating...and there's some furniture that's getting dropped out at the curb.

See, God loves to rearrange the furniture of the universe...and God loves an underdog more than any sports movie fan that's ever lived.

In the generations after the flood, God saw the growing world...and picked out Abraham and Sarah...old...end of the road folks...and told them they would be a new beginning. They would be the father and mother of a great family...all evidence to the contrary.

And my how that family has branched and grown...from our Muslim siblings – the descendants of Ishmael...to the Israelite people – who claim Isaac as their ancestor...and out of whom grew the family of the followers of Jesus.

God takes the places where it looks like life is impossible and says...yep...we'll build it right here. This is where the future begins. God is that prodigal sower of seeds who throws them on the path and among rocks and thorns and on good soil...because God knows that life can take root in anything. God comes by it honestly, too. After all, they were there to make life take root first in...nothing. If life can start in nothing...well...then where is life impossible?

God chooses Sarah and Hannah...and Ruth and Naomi...and Elizabeth and Mary...and so many others impossible people to bear life to the world.

And even that isn't enough. Because God can't stay at a distance...God wants nothing more than to sweep up all the precious hurting world, and gather us under her wing...like a hen scoops up a wobbly, wandering brood.

And God isn't coming into a world full of foxes, dressed up as the most clever and sharp-toothed one of them all. When there's a fox in the henhouse, God is siding with the hens. God is becoming one of those hens, whose warmth pulls us close when it's cold and whose wing wraps around us when there is danger.

God will not accept that it is a part of the furniture of the universe that some will get chewed up and spit out by hate, violence, injustice or indifference. God will rearrange the very furniture of the universe to keep it from being that way.

God will even become the hen that walks into the jaws of the fox...of Herod and Rome and all the rest. God will be the one who plants a new tree in a desolate place...who turns a hill of death by crucifixion into a new Eden. Because God looks at the places of death and indifference in the world...and breaks open with compassion...and pours love and life into those places...into those people who are broken, hurting, hopeless, and alone. That is who and how God chooses to transform the world.

It's how God has been transforming the world since the days of Abraham. It's somewhat obscure and bloody history...but God is already showing how God will enter the world in self-giving love when the covenant is cut with Abraham. During the ritual described in Genesis today, it was part of the covenant-making custom to walk between the parts of animals that had been cut up in a sacrifice. First the more powerful party to the covenant would walk through...then the lesser. It was to symbolize what should happen if either of them broke the covenant...that they would be slaughtered, too...like the animals whose blood was on their feet.

Sounds too familiar. Why more slaughter? Why more bloodshed?

But after Abraham has laid out the sacrifice he sees a vision of a smoking pot and a flaming torch that pass through. The first might be an image of God's presence...who often comes robed in smoke. And then...it should have been Abraham's turn...but instead...there is a torch...a guiding light. And Abraham doesn't pass through at all. God has put God's own self on the line in creating this covenant, and in this moment seems to have spared

Abraham the risk of destruction. Because God chooses to take our destruction into God's own self.

Fox in the hen house? Jesus is with the hens.

So, if we need to know where God is today...and we do...we always do...we can be assured...God is in Christchurch, New Zealand sweeping up our Muslim siblings in the softest and most tear-filled embrace. God is in the work fields, brothels, and back rooms with the people whose lives have been treated as though they are for sale, holding them in a way that says clearer than words that their lives are priceless and that they are not alone. Jesus is with the forgotten and invisible ones. All of which is to say, that Jesus is here, too...in every brokenness and shame in our lives...those we have suffered and those we have caused. Jesus is in broken bread and wine poured out...which also means that Jesus will go out from here...in us...like hens among foxes...and Jesus' game plan is to trust that the gentle love of a hen will bring more life than the foxes bring death.

The sweep of God's wing is wide enough for everyone who is hurting, broken and alone. There is no line of distinction that God won't cross. God loves us all so much that God's first desire when God sees us is the same as the father whose son returned home after squandering his inheritance. Nothing else matters until the father can wrap his arms around his child. Nothing. Else. Matters. And then...everything matters...because God's holds our whole selves in God's love – the parts we love, the parts we hide, the parts we are proud of, and the parts we are ashamed of. And everything begins again. Life is born out of death. From there, what else could we do...except to be a part of the healing of the world?

And so we shall be...by the grace of God.

Amen.