

Sermon Luke 13:31-35

2nd Sunday in Lent

March 16th, 2025

Facebook recently reminded me of a memory from 11 years ago – Facebook does that kind of stuff. So 11 years ago, I wrote, “One of my 2-year-olds at church sees me in a white robe for the first time on Ash Wednesday (I usually don’t robe for the contemporary Sunday services which he attends with his family). He stares at me with wide open eyes, thinks hard for a moment, then he waves at me with a big smile and says, ‘Hi, Mrs. Jesus!’ In moments like that, I love my job...”

So why did this youngster think I must be Mrs. Jesus? He probably saw images of Jesus in his children’s Bible; and how is Jesus usually depicted? With long hair, a beard, and then of course wearing a white flowing robe – as I was wearing that day 11 years ago. And many pieces of art depict Jesus in a similar way. And still do today. Just google ‘contemporary depictions of Jesus’, and you will find loads of images that show Jesus as this easily identifiable guy who, of course, would wear a white flowing robe even if he came back today...

Now can you imagine traveling the dusty and filthy roads of Galilee and Jerusalem in a long white robe? Just wearing such a garment for worship is quite cumbersome. It would be a very impractical thing to wear in daily life. And the Bible gives us clues that Jesus probably was wearing more practical clothing, and didn’t look much different from his disciples; just before Jesus is arrested, Judas, his betrayer, tells the authorities that he would greet Jesus with a kiss, and that’s how they could identify him. That certainly wouldn’t be necessary if Jesus stood out in that white robe...

And I think there’s more to the depiction of Jesus in flowy white robes than meets the eye. For *this* Jesus is more of an ethereal and spiritual figure, a divine entity from a realm that somehow is above earthly affairs. And when we look at this Jesus (in white flowing robes), we might think that there is a distinction between the heavenly and the earthly realm, between spiritual and ‘real’ life, and that somehow our faith life can - and should - be apolitical. Isn’t it all about heaven?

However, Jesus was not somehow above all the political realities of his day. On the contrary: he was totally enmeshed in them. His words and parables of the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven – a realm where peace and justice reign, where there is enough for everyone, and where mourning and crying and death are no

more - were (and still are) a defiant protest against the political powers of the day. And this somehow made him a threat.

Case in point: the gospel story we just heard. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, and he's been upsetting the authorities with his subversive parables about God's kingdom – parables like the ones about the prodigal son, the lost sheep, and the rich fool. That doesn't sit right with the powers that be. Some Pharisees come and warn him: get away from here, for King Herod wants to kill you. And that's believable, since he already had John the Baptist beheaded. And Jesus has some very direct, even angry words: tell that fox from me...! Jesus doesn't mince words, Jesus isn't staying out of politics, but calls out Herod's abuse of power.

And he laments, 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem – how often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings!'

And in the context of the entire story, Jesus most likely is not talking about a quaint barnyard scene, but rather about a mother hen who is fiercely trying to protect her brood from any harm, willing to sacrifice herself for the sake of her chicks. Because there are foxes like Herod out there, people who are willing and quick to use violence against others to protect their status, their privileges, their power. Because that's all they have, and they cling to it by all - and often ruthless - means.

Throughout history there have been plenty of foxes, despots and tyrants who have no regard for life and consequently no regard for God, the giver and lover of life. History tends to repeat itself, and tyrants, be it big ones on the world stage or small ones at home, still abuse their power today and, in cowardly fashion, use it against those who are the most vulnerable – often women and children.

Why in the world would Jesus compare himself to a mother hen? What chance does she stand against the foxes of this world?

Why couldn't, why can't God be more like an apex predator, maybe like a proverbial mama bear, smiting all those who blatantly abuse military, political, economic, physical or psychological power? I have to admit that I sometimes long for such a God when I look at all the violence and abuse of power in this world today.

But Jesus, God incarnate, chooses to be like a mother hen. Jesus, God incarnate, chooses a power the foxes of this world sadly and infuriatingly don't seem to know: love. And I'm not talking about a kind of love that is sentimental and ooey-

gooey, but a love that is extremely vulnerable - like a mother hen. A love that holds a mirror to all hatred and ignorance and indifference in the world – a love that knows true compassion – a love that stands in true solidarity with the vulnerable - a love that is defiant and stubborn and fierce (you don't mess with a mother hen!) – a love that seeks to transform, not to coerce. A love that goes so far as to offer the greatest sacrifice for the sake of someone else. A love that is willing to die on the cross for the sake of all creation.

We belong to and follow this God who chooses love, who IS love. And though we are all imperfect and partake in unjust and destructive systems - though we are all sinners, as we say in church jargon - we are chosen by God to be the body of Christ – vulnerable, yes, but equipped and entrusted with the most powerful force there is.

At this point I want to go back to the story of the 2 year old calling me 'Mrs. Jesus'. Did he really mistake me for Jesus, or a female form of Jesus? I can't say. I understood it in the way that I am Mrs. Jesus, because I am married to Jesus – somehow. And if you think about it, there is some truth in this. Jesus Christ made a commitment to me on the day of my baptism – I made a commitment to him on the day of my confirmation, and in a sense I am renewing my vows all the time. And that's true for each and any one of us. We all are bound in love to the one who is love – and bound in love to each other. If we say we are committed to Jesus Christ, we also have to say that we are committed to the kind of love he lived – for the sake of our neighbor and for the sake of the world. And we are called to reflect this love, in word and deed and example for others. Talk about a Lenten practice that is difficult, as we have to stretch ourselves and our hearts quite a bit to do just that.

In all of that, we know that God has our back. God, the mother hen, will always fiercely protect her brood, to the point of giving her life. And you don't mess with this mother hen. This is the God we believe in. This is the God we follow. This is the God we are to share - in and through our own lives in a world dominated by foxes. Amen