

## Lent 2C 2022 Sermon

### Luke 13:31-35

*Some Pharisees came and said to Jesus, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." 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. 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.' 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! 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.'"*

I was not trained to read the Bible in a right-brained, imaginative way; and so, I never noticed something in today's Gospel passage, despite the countless times I have read it. I have always seen in this passage Jesus' determination to go to Jerusalem, and his grief over the fact that his own people refuse to hear the message God has sent him to deliver. But this past week, when I read this Gospel passage one more time, what I saw was a story of a fox and a hen.

At the beginning of our reading, Jesus is warned that Herod wants to kill him; and Jesus instructs the messengers to "Go and tell that *fox*..." Now, I had always assumed that that word "fox" simply referred to Herod's cunning and deception. But just three sentences later, Jesus uses another animal image to refer to *himself*: **he** is like a mother hen wanting to gather her children together under her wings in loving protection. And I began to see that Herod the fox represents a scheming and predatory approach to life; and Jesus the mother hen represents a very vulnerable and loving approach to life.

Several times in the Gospels, Jesus tells his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, where he will be betrayed, rejected, made to suffer, and put to death. The first time Peter hears this prediction, he rebukes Jesus (Mark 8:32); other times, when the disciples hear Jesus predict his suffering and death, they are silent and dumbfounded (Mark 9:32); for it makes no sense to them. Why would *anyone* **willfully** continue down a pathway they know will lead to betrayal, great suffering, rejection by the leaders of his own religion, and, finally, being put to death? It makes no sense; because *intentionally* allowing oneself or one's group to be vulnerable to possible harm is **not** the way that the kingdoms of *this* world operate. But *Jesus* operates within the kingdom of **God**, and, as we have seen over and over again, the kingdom of God is very different from the kingdoms of this world, enthralled as they are with power and control.

Bible scholar David Lose points out that the kind of courage that Jesus displays by walking straight into certain betrayal, great suffering, rejection by the leaders of his own faith community, and death, is the kind of courage that arises from

willingly allowing oneself to be vulnerable – like a mother hen who guards her brood against a fox.<sup>1</sup>

Now, in the culture of Jesus' day, as well as in the culture of our own day, we don't often equate vulnerability with courage and strength. On the contrary: we most often see vulnerability as a sign of weakness, something to be avoided at all costs. No politician wanting to win an election will run on a platform of vulnerability; they wouldn't stand a *chance* of winning.

And yet we see this theme of vulnerability throughout the Gospel of Luke. Jesus is born a helpless infant and laid in a manger because there is no room in the inn. (Luke 2:7) In another place in Luke's Gospel, Jesus sends 72 of his followers out into the surrounding towns, telling them, "I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals..." (Luke 10:3-9) First, Jesus is imagined as a vulnerable hen as opposed to the predatory fox, Herod; *then*, we have the disciples imagined as vulnerable lambs sent out into a world of vicious wolves, where they are to be totally dependent on others – not one penny in their pockets. In another place, Jesus tells his disciples, "Whoever doesn't receive the kingdom of God as a little child receives it will never enter it." (Luke 18:17) An open, vulnerable little child. And again, Jesus tells his disciples: "In this world the kings and great men lord it over their people... But among you it will be different. Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant." (Luke 22:25-26) When Jesus is brought before Pilate and Herod before his crucifixion, he does not defend himself. (Luke 23:3, 9) And on the cross, his first words are, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34) Throughout his life, Jesus models for us what vulnerable love looks like.

To anticipate rejection and suffering and death and not look away, to make oneself vulnerable for the sake of others and for the sake of being one's true self, who one is in God, is not weakness; it is the very height of courage.

Today we are blessed to be able to participate in the baptisms of Asher and Rosemary. What this young family has gone through with Rosemary's cancer and cancer treatments – the pain and heartache of having hopes raised and then dashed, raised and dashed, again and again – few of us, if any, can even imagine. And while we fervently pray that Rosemary's cancer does not return, there is no guarantee. But if it does, Rosemary and her family will face it with the same vulnerable courage they have shown through 26 X-rays, 10 CT scans, 9 MRI's, 128 blood draws, 119 chemotherapy infusions, 210 chemo treatments at home, 23 radiation treatments, 10 blood transfusions, a major tumor resection and countless days and nights in the hospital getting antibiotics. This young family stands as a witness to us of courageous vulnerability, born of, and sustained by, a deep and fierce love.

“To love at all is to be vulnerable,” wrote C.S. Lewis. “Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal.”<sup>2</sup> This, of course, is Jesus’ dilemma: he loves *all* and *everything*; and to love is to be vulnerable. In John’s First Letter, we are told that God IS love;<sup>3</sup> and therefore, **God** is vulnerable. Richard Rohr has often said that instead of beginning our prayers with, “Almighty God,” we should at times begin them with, “All-vulnerable God.” Fr. Richard writes: “**We** like control; **God**... loves vulnerability... On the cross, God is revealed as vulnerability itself.”<sup>4</sup>

David Lose notes that in today’s Gospel passage, “Jesus demonstrates that vulnerability is **essential** to courage, vulnerability stands at the core of the Christian life, and vulnerability invites us to discover the... strength of being open to the needs of those around us.”<sup>5</sup> Last week, on the First Sunday in Lent, we read that Jesus went into the wilderness for 40 days, to be tempted by the devil. “The desert took away all barriers between his soul and God’s wide gaze,” writes Episcopal priest Heidi Haverkamp. “There is a long tradition in scripture of faithful people going alone into the wilderness and encountering God, including Hagar, Moses, Elijah... Jesus goes [into the wilderness] to expose himself to God: being intentionally vulnerable.”<sup>6</sup>

As I mentioned last week, *our* 40 days of Lent are patterned after Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness; and therefore, Lent is a time for us, also, to become vulnerable before God. To spend time in prayer, open to God. To spend time vulnerably opening ourselves to *others* in their need; and acting, in what ways we can, to alleviate their suffering. To spend time courageously examining our own hearts, seeing where they have become hardened or walled off, letting go of our false selves so that who we truly are in God might emerge. Richard Rohr writes, “[W]hat we call ‘vulnerability’ might just be the key to ongoing growth. In my experience, healthily vulnerable people use every occasion to expand, change, and grow... [A young lobster, after all, must shed its protective shell, several times, in order to grow.]

“Yet it is a risky position – to live undefended in a kind of constant openness to the other – because it means others could sometimes actually wound us. Indeed, [the word ‘vulnerable’] comes from the Latin word ‘to wound.’ But only if we take this risk do we also allow the *opposite* possibility: [that] the other [person] might also *gift* us, *free* us, and even *love* us.”<sup>8</sup>

Our Lenten wilderness is a time for us to be vulnerable to God; vulnerable to letting go of our small self in order that we might live and grow into our larger, truer Self; vulnerable to the pain and suffering of the world.

“To run from vulnerability,” writes poet David Whyte, “is to run from the essence of our nature; the attempt to be invulnerable is the vain attempt to become something we are not...” To be human is to be vulnerable. And to be Christian, a

follower of Jesus, is to be a hen, not a fox. After all, have we not come to know Christ best through the manger and the cross?<sup>9</sup>

AMEN

<sup>1</sup> David Lose, *In the Meantime* Blog, [http://www.davidlose.net/2016/02/lent-2-courage-and-vulnerability/?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+davidlose%2FIsqE+%28...In+the+Meantime%29](http://www.davidlose.net/2016/02/lent-2-courage-and-vulnerability/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+davidlose%2FIsqE+%28...In+the+Meantime%29)

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis (1898-1963), *The Four Loves*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1960, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1960, p. 121

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 4:8

<sup>4</sup> “Absolute Vulnerability,” Richard Rohr’s Daily Email Meditation, Wednesday, March 8, 2017 <https://cac.org/absolute-vulnerability-2017-03-08/>

<sup>5</sup> Lose, *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> “The Wilderness,” an excerpt from Heidi Haverkamp’s book, *Holy Solitude* <https://collegevilleinstitute.org/bearings/the-wilderness/>

<sup>7</sup> “Absolute Vulnerability,” Richard Rohr’s Daily Email Meditation, Wednesday, March 8, 2017 <https://cac.org/absolute-vulnerability-2017-03-08/>

<sup>8</sup> “Vulnerability,” Richard Rohr’s Daily Email Meditation, Tuesday, September 27, 2016 <https://cac.org/vulnerability-2016-09-27/>

<sup>9</sup> Lose, *ibid.*