

Herod wants to kill you. That's a heavy thing to hear. I have never had anyone want to kill me before. In fact, I've never been in a real physical fight before. I've had people of people mad at me. I've been yelled at. I've had fingers shook in my direction. I've intervened between people who were ready to fight with each other, but I don't think I've ever had someone threaten to harm me physically, much less want to kill me. So, I don't know how I would react if someone told me what the Pharisees told Jesus about Herod, "Go! Get away from here, because Herod wants to kill you." I'm guessing I wouldn't respond the way Jesus did.

Jesus doesn't seem too concerned about Herod, does he? Now, there are some scholars who think the Pharisees are bluffing and are just trying to scare Jesus away, but we know that Herod is capable of terrible violence. Just think of what he did to John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin. Herod had John beheaded. So, even if the Pharisees are bluffing, Jesus had every reason to believe it was true, yet here's how he responds: **"Go, tell that fox, 'Look, I'm throwing out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will complete my work.'"** Jesus doesn't seem too worried, does he? In the face a genuine threat, Jesus' response is basically, Herod wants to kill me? Well, bless his heart, but my schedule is quite full right now. I'm busy setting people free and healing them over the next few days. So, if he wants to kill to me, he knows where to find me. Incredible, isn't it? Can you imagine being so secure in who you are and what you're here to do that even death doesn't scare you? Jesus is the embodiment of non-violent courage in a violent world.

This is not how most of us respond to the threat of bodily harm, is it? Our normal response is to protect ourselves. Whether its locks on our doors, hand sanitizer, a self-defense class, a home security system, or an N-95 mask, when threatened, we seek protection. Two years ago this week, the pandemic came to Ohio, and back then, protecting myself looked like washing my groceries. Anyone else do that? Yeah, that was fun. As I think back to that time, I remember the fear and the anxiety that was all around us. Now after two years of a pandemic that has dragged on longer than any of us anticipated, right when it appears things might be easing up, a fox decides to invade the nation of Ukraine.

For the past 2 ½ weeks, we've seen images and heard stories that break our hearts. 2.6 million have been displaced as refugees in just two weeks time. It all feels out of place, as though it's from another time, another century. I've spoken with several of you who are truly grieving these events and what they might mean for the future. I am too. In the midst of all this unnecessary suffering, we see people bravely standing together in solidarity, holding off the invasion with all they have, reminding us of the precious gift that is freedom and democracy, and their courage inspires us. We've seen entire Russian units surrender to the Ukrainian army, saying, we didn't sign up for this. We've seen our fiercely divided world join voices in standing with the people of Ukraine. There are of course different ideas of what we should do, but we are united with one voice, saying this is wrong. This should not be happening. When foxes threaten to kill innocent victims, we stand with the victims.

Jesus, in the face of bodily harm, gives us an image of God that we can hold onto when fear comes knocking on our door and bullies threaten to victimize us. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. That is where he will finish his work of liberation and healing. No threat of violence will deter him because this is what he is called to do by God: to free and to heal. He says I'm going to keep doing this work today, tomorrow, and on the third day it will be

complete, which of course is an allusion to the Resurrection. And while he knows he will be rejected by the powers that be, he longs for Jerusalem to take the path of peace. In his lament for the city, he says, **“How often I have wanted to gather your people just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.”** Jesus compares himself to a mother hen. His desire is that his people would allow him to mother them. Perhaps this is the verse Julian of Norwich, the 14th century mystic had in mind when she wrote, “Christ Jesus is our true Mother. He is the source of all motherhood, and we have our being from him, protected by all the sweet love that endlessly accompanies motherhood.” Isn’t that incredible? Julian wrote that in the late 1300s in England, the first surviving book we have written by a woman in the English language.

The promise that Jesus gives to Jerusalem, to the people of Ukraine, and to us all, is that he will gather us like a mother hen gathers her chicks. It’s an image of warmth, tenderness, and belonging. Of course, not everyone’s relationship to their mother looks the same, but I can think back to times in my life when I was hurt and afraid, and what I wanted most in those moments was not power to fight back and protect myself. What I wanted most was the embrace of my mother. For me, there was no safer place in the world than in the arms of Deb Esala. That’s exactly what Jesus longs to be for us as well, if only we allow him.

Jesus’ response to the threat of Herod the fox is that he is the mother hen, ready to gather us under his wing. Now, have any of you heard the expression, “There’s a fox in the henhouse”? What does that mean? It means there’s a predator on the loose, doesn’t it? And foxes eat hens. Now here is where Jesus’ promise is most challenging, and I learned this from Nadia Bolz Weber. Hens gather their chicks under their wing, but they cannot stop a determined fox from harming them or their children. So what good is Jesus’ promise to us vulnerable chicks in a world with foxes? Maybe the antidote to fear isn’t safety. What if it’s love? Love doesn’t keep us safe from harm, but when we are embraced by divine love, then there really is nothing to be afraid of. Danger is not optional, but fear is, because the opposite of fear isn’t bravery, it’s love.

There are people in Ukraine right now, our siblings who are in grave danger. I want to show you a video of a small church in Kiev. This was shot last Sunday morning.

[Video Clip Here]

Even in the face of mortal danger, the love of God holds us close, and that love is enough. Some of you may know the song they were singing, and we are going to sing it as our closing hymn. These are the lyrics of the last verse of that hymn:

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life’s first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand:
Till He returns or calls me home,

Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

We grieve with those who are suffering today in Ukraine, and we pray for an end to this unlawful conflict. But even in the hell of war, the love of God gathers her people, reminding them that nothing can pluck them from God's hand. Friends, in this world, there will be foxes, but amidst all the dangers you will ever face, God gathers you under her wing in warmth, tenderness, and belonging, both now and forever. Amen.