

## **“The Fox and the Hen” Luke 13:31-35**

**If you were an animal, what animal would you want to be? Would you want to be a tiger prowling through the jungle? Or a chimpanzee swinging through the trees? Or a dog playing fetch? Or a robin singing its beautiful song? Or a playful otter romping happily in the river? That last one would be my wife’s choice since she likes otters.**

**This week, I took two brief online quizzes<sup>1</sup> that were supposed to tell me what animal I am most like based on my personality and preferences. The first one said that I am a sheep, which is not too flattering. But on the other hand, it sounds pretty good for a pastor since “*the Lord is my shepherd*”, right?**

**The other quiz told me that I am most like a cat. I am glad that I am *not* a cat for the simple reason that we already have two cats at our house and Berni has told me in no uncertain terms that we absolutely, positively are not *ever* getting a third cat. So if I were a cat, I’d need to start looking for a new home.**

**If we were able to ask King Herod who ruled the region of Galilee for the Roman government in the first century this question, I wonder which animal he would choose.**

**If he was anything like most kings and rulers, Herod would probably want folks to think that he was a mighty lion, the king of the jungle. Or maybe, he would want to be a ferocious wolf, able to devour any prey. Or he might have considered himself to be a great eagle soaring in the heavens up above all the common folk.**

**Most likely, Herod would not have appreciated being called a fox. Foxes were considered vermin or what folks back in my neck of the woods would have called varmints. They were thought of as clever and cunning creatures. But they were not really scary. They were not particularly dangerous.**

**They were more like pests. They were a nuisance. They could destroy some of your crops out in the field. They could attack and kill some of your livestock. But they were not really a threat to human beings.**

**When Jesus referred to Herod as a fox, he was putting him into his place. One of Aesop’s fables<sup>2</sup> tells about a fox who was prowling around the chicken coop late one night. And the fox saw an old hen up roosting in a place higher than he could reach.**

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<sup>1</sup> I took this idea from Rev. Stephen Montgomery at [http://day1.org/8344-stephen\\_montgomery\\_the\\_one\\_big\\_thing](http://day1.org/8344-stephen_montgomery_the_one_big_thing)

<sup>2</sup> As shared in <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/sermon/loving-mother-hen-lent-2-c-2016>.

So the fox called out to the hen. *“Good news!”* he shouted. *“I bring good news!”*

*“What is it?”* asked the hen.

*“You know that the lion is the king of all the animals,”* said the fox, *“and he has declared a universal truce. By his royal decree, no animal may harm or injure another animal, not even so much as one hair or fin or feather. We are now to live in peaceful friendship and harmony. Won’t you come down and celebrate with me, little hen?”*

*“Well, that is good news,”* the hen replied. *“I’ll be right down, but look over there! I see another creature who may join us in celebrating this wonderful news!”*

*“Who is it?”* asked the fox, almost licking his lips in anticipation.

*“Why, it is my master’s big dog coming right toward us,”* answered the hen. *“Where are you going, Mr. Fox? Leaving so soon? Why not wait and celebrate this universal peace with the dog?”*

And the fox called back as he ran quickly away, *“I would be glad to do so. But I’m afraid that the dog has not heard this good news yet.”*

The fox was clever. The fox was cunning. The fox could cause problems.

But the fox was not going to stop Jesus from going to Jerusalem. The fox was not going to keep him from doing what it was that he came to do-- driving out demons and healing people. The fox was not going to intimidate Jesus because the fox was not the big dog.

And yet Jesus himself was no big dog either. What happens if we turn the question from the beginning of this sermon around just a little bit?

If Jesus was an animal, what animal would he be? What animal was Jesus most like?

Many of us would probably think of a few of the same creatures that we mentioned earlier.

Jesus is the great lion of Judah, the mighty King of kings. Or Jesus is a great eagle soaring through the sky and bearing us upon his wings.

**Jesus is a peaceful dove gently and softly flying through the air. Or perhaps, a swift, powerful white stallion racing through the dust and carrying all who ride him to victory.**

**If it were left up to us, we probably would not think of Jesus as being like a chicken. But that is the image that came to his own mind as he thought about his work here in Luke's gospel.**

**Jesus imagines himself as a mother hen calling for her chicks to come under her wings. The mother hen has no sharp teeth or fangs. The mother hen has no claws or rippling muscles.**

**All the mother hen has is her willingness to stand between the foxes and her chicks. All she can do is call to them so that they may take refuge under her wings.**

**The mother hen is not a fierce creature, but she is fiercely loving. She does not use her strength to attack so much as to protect her little ones. The only thing she has to give is her very life.**

**In the midst of all the calamities and disasters that have occurred since then, you may not remember the tragic earthquake that struck the city of Bam in Iran on the day after Christmas in 2003. Over 26,000 people died in that earthquake. And one of the few who survived was a tiny six month old baby girl named Nassim.**

**Nassim was trapped in her home with her mother when the earthquake hit. The building began to collapse and debris began to fall all around them. There was absolutely no reason to expect little Nassim to live through it.**

**However, 37 hours later, after the earthquake had ended and rescuers had started digging through the rubble to see if there were any survivors, they found the little girl. She was safe and secure and in reasonably good condition. She was wrapped up tight cradled in her dead mother's arms. You might say that she was gathered under her wings.<sup>3</sup>**

**That is a mother hen for you. And an Episcopal priest named Barbara Brown Taylor reminds us that Jesus is most like a mother hen when he is on the cross. His arms outstretched. His wings spread out. His breast exposed to the world.<sup>4</sup>**

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2003/dec/30/iran.naturaldisasters>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.religion-online.org/article/as-a-hen-gathers-her-brood/>

**Not lashing out at anyone, but offering shelter and protection to all God's children. He makes himself completely vulnerable. He is ready to give up his own life if he has to.**

**Jesus seeks to gather us under his wings. He invites us to come together as sisters and brothers under the cross. There at the cross is the place where we can find shelter from all the foxes in the world who want to cause us trouble.**

**There are no big dogs around. But there is a Mother Hen who has given his life for us. There is a Mother Hen who spreads his wings over us.**

**Yet are we willing? Are we willing to take our place under the Mother Hen's wings? Are we willing to gather with one another under the cross? Are we willing to recognize that we are little baby chicks dependent upon our Mother Hen? Little baby chicks who have to stick close to one another if we want to live?**

**Or are we pretending to be some other kind of creature?**

**Do we like to think of ourselves as lone wolves who can make it just fine on our own without anyone else? Do we picture ourselves as 800 pound gorillas who go where we want and do as we wish without needing any assistance or help? Do we imagine that we are a raging bull able to trample whoever or whatever gets in our way?**

**I don't know what kind of animals the people of Jerusalem wanted to be, but it evidently wasn't little baby chicks. They were not willing to be gathered under the wings of their Mother Hen. They were not willing to take shelter under the cross.**

**They would run away from him. They would reject him. They would reject being the little baby chicks of the Mother Hen. Jesus knew that he was going to Jerusalem where he would be stoned and killed.**

**And yet, he never, ever stopped trying to bring them under his wings. He never, ever stopped reaching out and gathering them back to him.**

**Jesus likens himself to a mother hen, but he reminds me of another mother, the one in the children's picture book entitled *The Runaway Bunny*. That book tells the story of a little bunny and his mother. It goes like this:**

***Once, there was a little bunny who wanted to run away. So he said to his mother, "I'm running away."***

*“If you run away,” said the mother, “I will run after you. For you are my little bunny.”*

*“If you run after me,” said the little bunny, “I will become a fish in a trout stream and I will swim away from you.”*

*“If you become a fish in a trout stream,” said his mother, “I will become a fisherman and I will fish for you.”*

*“If you become a fisherman,” said the little bunny, “I will be a bird and fly away from you.”*

*“If you become a bird and fly away from me,” said the mother, “I will be a tree that you can come home to.”*

*“Shucks,” said the little bunny, “I might just as well stay where I am and be your little bunny.” And so he did.*

*“Have a carrot,” said the mother bunny.<sup>5</sup>*

Little baby chicks like you and me, we scatter ourselves all over the place just like the little bunny. We run here and there and everywhere getting ourselves into trouble. But no matter how far we go, no matter what we do, Jesus never, ever stops calling us back into his embrace.

The foxes are out there making their plans and schemes. But they can never, ever stand up to the fierce, vulnerable love of the Mother Hen. I mean, how can you defeat someone who is willing to give up his own life even for the sake of those who would reject him and kill him?

We cannot run away from the love of the mother bunny. The Mother Hen is always calling us back under his wings. In this season of Lent, Jesus is always calling us back to the cross.

There, we can take refuge. There, we can find life. There, we can find hope. There, we can find peace.

May it be so.

**In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

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<sup>5</sup> *The Runaway Bunny*, Margaret Wise Brown, 1942.

