



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

February 28, 2010
Second Sunday of Lent
Jim Sundholm

RCL: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:17–4:1; Luke 13:31-35 or Luke 9:28-36

LM: Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18; Psalm 27:1, 7-8, 8-9, 13-14; Philippians 3:17–4:1 or 3:20–4:1; Luke 9:28b-36

The image of the barnyard contest between the “fox” and the “hen” in the text from Luke makes for an awfully tempting sermon. The fox comes by night with the power of death, and the hen gathers her brood under her wings for sanctuary and life. It seems that there really is a contrast in this world between predator and prey, between fox-power and hen-power. In this text we encounter a God-hen who is not afraid of a Herod-fox. This is an interesting title for Jesus that he takes upon himself, a name that conjures up vulnerability and frailty. (How many of us own a guard-hen?) I’ve never prayed to Jesus our mother hen, but maybe I should, for he is the hen who “gathers” the children for life.

The world reality is that as we confront hunger and poverty issues, it feels as if it is a contest involving a hen against a fox. World leaders focus their strength in fox-power, the power to take life, to threaten and raid. The Church is a bunch of old hens, and that’s a compliment! Unafraid of the “fox,” we spend our lives offering sanctuary to vulnerable and weary folks. We cry out to the running-little-ones, “Come, we will gather you and seek to preserve your life.”

In 2001 a morning raid by a Khartoum-sponsored militia devastated the south Sudan village of Maiwut. They came at 6:45 in the morning, just at dawn. They shot anything that moved: children, chickens, women, and men—it didn’t matter. About forty-eight persons died in that raid. Staying about five hours away, I inquired of several grieving friends, “How do you stand this?” In my own hot anger, I was thinking earthly revenge. They responded, “This is why we are Christians. Where else can we go?” They had a grasp of Jesus the hen that gathers those who suffer and are persecuted. Embracing hen activity is how the Church can have the mind of Christ.

Paul, writing to his “loved ones” in Philippi in what are probably the last days of his life, urges them not to imitate folks who set their minds on earthly things. Like the fox, those others desire to satisfy the belly, gratifying their immediate need. They are takers, not givers. We have a different citizenship, with different values. Earlier in his letter, Paul



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encourages his friends to have the “mind of Christ,” to be genuinely concerned for the welfare of others and not seek their own interests (2:4-5).

Genesis 15 is one strange text, particularly the part about all the cut-in-half animals. In the previous chapter Abram rescues his nephew, proves himself a tough warrior, receives Melchizedek’s blessing, and declines to take goods from the battles because he wants no person to say that they, not God, have made him rich. In other words, he will not accept the mind of the “fox” that takes spoils. But as chapter 15 opens, Abram is worried about the heir issue. God’s promises remind Abram not to take this matter into his own hands. “I’ve got you ‘covered’—hen that I am” is God’s essential message. Descendants there will be, along with hardship for his tribe, but God will guard him to a full age. God tends to Abram during a terrifying sleep and initiates the covenant.

Psalms 27 picks up multiple images of God as a strong and safe place. God is a dwelling place, a shelter, a stronghold, a tent, a hiding place, all images consistent with Jesus’ use of the terms “hen” and “covering wings,” wings that shelter from the “fox,” the enemy. In verse 11 the psalmist cries out for a teaching of God’s ways and leading in God’s path, which echoes in the text from Philippians. This is once again a call for the Church to preach “good news” to those who are suffering and downtrodden. We who have recognized this “place” in God are to be such a place for a hurting and broken world. In God’s name we offer shelter, food, safety, covering, and all that those images convey. We are a sign of another kingdom, and we stand fearless of the fox as we welcome persons into God’s provision and care.

Children’s Time [Larry Hollar]

Talk about hens and foxes, and their respective roles in the natural world. Introduce the mother hen image as a symbol of safety and protection, and connect it with the ways in which God, through Jesus, offers us comfort and care in what can be a scary world. Maybe have enough adults present that you can act out the “gathering under the wings” idea, as children nestle under the welcoming arms of their teachers and children’s ministry leaders as a sign of the church’s deep caring for their well-being.

Musical Suggestions [Larry Hollar]

Faith, While Trees Are Still in Blossom—*The United Methodist Hymnal* 508

You Are My Hiding Place—*The Faith We Sing* 2055

On Eagle’s Wings—*Gather Comprehensive* 611



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O Jesus Christ, May Grateful Hymns—*The New Century Hymnal* 212

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