

## **The Hen in the Fox House**

[Text - Luke 13:31-35]

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In this morning's New Testament reading, Jesus calls King Herod a sly "fox". To me, Herod's more like a sleazy "wolf". Herod seduces and marries his own brother's wife, Herodias; and then arrests John the Baptist because John speaks-out against it. Later, at a birthday celebration for Herod, the drunken the King is beguiled by the sensual dancing of his young stepdaughter, who is also his niece! He says to the girl [traditionally named *Salome*] "I'll give you whatever you ask, up to half my kingdom!" So Salome, with her mother's prodding, asks for the head of John the Baptist on a platter! Herod, not wanting to appear weak in front of his guests, agrees.

King Herod is a spiteful, suspicious, and superstitious individual. His tremendous lack of moral decency, is matched only by his tremendous fascination with all things religious and supernatural. When he first hears about Jesus, Herod fears that he could be John the Baptist, risen from the dead - which makes him extremely nervous! And as Jesus heads toward Jerusalem for the Passover Festival, Herod - along with many other political and religious leaders - continues to be extremely edgy. Jesus has been inspiring people throughout Israel with his powerful teaching, his remarkable healing, and his compassionate outreach to society's outcast and oppressed. In fact, the energy and excitement that Jesus is generating, is reminiscent of the mood that surrounded John the Baptist, before Herod had him beheaded. So now Herod has his sights set on Jesus; just as Jesus has *his* sights set on Jerusalem. And because a collision between these two seems imminent, some Pharisees go to *warn* Jesus about Herod's deadly intentions.

It's not exactly clear whether these Pharisees' real concern is for Jesus' safety, or for simply protecting their own interests in the current precarious balance of power. Regardless, Jesus refuses to be derailed from his ministry and mission. He says, "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.' ” In other words, Jesus really doesn't care about Herod's threats, or any threats! He will hold true to his mission, regardless of what it may cost him.

Herod may *be* a sly and dangerous old fox, but Jesus isn't impressed. His ministry is rooted and grounded in Divine Love and Grace; and Jesus answers to a Power far greater than King Herod, or even Tiberius Caesar! Therefore, he will not deviate from his path. He will continue to cast out evil, heal the sick, and raise-up the oppressed one day after the next, as long as he has life and breath. And though it's becoming increasingly clear that his ministry may well cost him his life, Jesus is resolved to proclaim the Good News of Divine Love, even with his *dying* breath!

Now, Jesus “sets his face toward *Jerusalem*”, not because of some misdirected martyr-complex; but so that he can make a direct appeal to people of Israel, at the very heart of their religious and political life. Jesus knows that this appeal for compassion and justice will be undermined by Herod, and other political and religious power-brokers. Nevertheless, Jesus' undying trust in the power of Divine Love, inspires him to continue his course. Going to Jerusalem for the Passover, is definitely going to shake-up the status quo; but that's what an authentic prophet of God must be willing to do. Challenging the rich and powerful is often the only way to show solidarity and support for the poor and powerless; even though it can put you in an extremely vulnerable position.

Ancient Jerusalem [not unlike *modern-day* Jerusalem] is a place where God's prophets often put their lives on the line. They stand with open arms, calling for their brothers and sisters to lay down *their* arms of war, and to embrace Divine peace, justice, and forgiveness. And this is precisely what Jesus intends to do. He passionately cries-out: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often I have desired to gather your

children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

Anyone who’s ever seen a loved one heading down a dangerous or destructive path, understands the depth of Jesus’ lament. You can warn that loved one, you can plead with him or her; but in the end, the best you can do is to keep your heart and your arms open to them. You and I can’t make anyone accept our compassion or care; we can only be willing to offer it. *Doing* so can put us in an extremely vulnerable position - arms wide-open, hearts completely exposed. But if we fully intend to be there for that person, then this is the position we must be willingly to take.

This remarkable picture of Jesus - like a mother hen gathering her little children under her wings to protect and embrace them - certainly challenges those old images of the mighty and vengeful warrior-god. It also says something significant about the required relationship and attitude among those little ones. Gathering under those wings requires a closeness, and a willingness to join together for the mutual benefit of all. And no chick, or child, can be excluded from the warmth of that Mother’s protective care. Throughout his ministry, Jesus does all within his power to bring reconciliation and unity, healing and peace to the divided and diverse people around him. And now, as he heads toward Jerusalem, Jesus is prepared to do the most powerful thing of all: to set *aside* his power, and throw his arms wide-open, as an expression of the Divine Desire to embrace and heal and redeem the entire world.

With all of the trouble and heartache in this world, sometimes the best course of action, is to simply offer a Holy Hug. Hugging someone is far more risky, yet far more effective, than giving them a lecture [or even a sermon]. When a parent finally finds a lost child, who has wandered-off, that parent will hug that child tightly and hold-on for dear life. The lecture can come later. All that matters in that present moment, is that the one who was lost has finally been found. And to our Gracious Heavenly Parent, that is the most important thing in the world! To find the lost;

To restore the hurting and oppressed;  
And to warmly welcome every child under her wings.