

Don't Mess with Mama!
Sunday, March 13, 2022
Second Sunday in Lent
Sermon Text: Luke 13:31-35

During the sermon a couple of weeks ago, I mentioned that I didn't own any camouflage clothes to wear to support our wild game dinner. That doesn't mean I don't love the outdoors, though. It just means I don't want to blend in with my environment, because that would be a negative for my favorite outdoor activity: hiking. I especially love hiking in the mountains. There is something about the clean air, the trees and majestic views that speaks to my soul like they few things can. However, mountains do come with something I don't like: bears. I have only seen a bear while hiking once and it was a good mile or so away across the valley. Whew! Common folklore says it's even worse to come across a female bear with her cubs since that is when they are most aggressive. (From my research, this appears to only be true for brown or polar bears. I'm still not taking any chances...) This protective behavior extends to many other animals, including humans. When we hear of a mother getting upset and protecting her kids from a bad situation, we call her a "mama bear". There are very few things in the world more fierce than the protection of a mother for her children. In our lectionary passage today in Luke 13:31-35 we see Jesus using a motherly metaphor to describe himself and his relationship to other humans.

³¹ At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." ³² 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. ³³ 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.’³⁴ 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!³⁵ 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.’”

The writer of Luke starts this section with throwing us a bit of a curveball. The Pharisees have consistently been portrayed as opposed to Jesus throughout the gospel. Yet, now, at least some of them appear to be trying to help Jesus. Which begs the questions of why they want to help. While the text doesn't directly address the issue, Jesus' response shows that Jesus doesn't see their warning as a friendly gesture. Jesus believes they are working for Herod since he tells them to go report back to Herod what Jesus has said. Thus, it seems to me that the most obvious answer is that these Pharisees are attempting to dissuade Jesus from going to Jerusalem. For whatever reason, they are attempting to distract Jesus from his mission in Jerusalem. Perhaps they are afraid of confronting this teacher who so far has beaten them in every challenge they are set before him. Perhaps they don't want his influence to spread to the most populous city in Israel. They also could be frightened that he is going to upset the political and religious order they have worked so hard to create and maintain. Maybe they are even afraid that Jesus might be persuasive to Herod.

Yet Herod was certainly someone to be feared. This is not Herod the Great from Jesus' birth narratives; this is his son Herod Antipas, who ruled the part of Israel where Jesus lived and did most of his work. Herod Antipas was a cruel and incompetent ruler. He married his

brother's ex-wife, which destroyed the political alliances forged by his first wife and led to a disastrous war. He then killed John the Baptist for speaking out about it. And then wanted to "see" Jesus, who is continuing the mission of John and some said maybe even John re-born.

(Luke 9:9)

But Jesus doesn't fear Herod, calling him "a fox", a description showing the cunning, destructive and unclean nature of Herod since foxes were considered unclean animals by Jews of the time. The fox is a sly and devious predator that prefers to work with stealth rather than brute force and this certainly describes the politics of Herod Antipas well. Jesus tells the Pharisees that he will continue to do the mission he is called to do, healing those who are spiritually and physically ill, and following the path of to Jerusalem and ultimately, the cross. Jesus is not going to let the threat of a "fox" stop him from loving and caring for others.

Jesus then turns his attention to Jerusalem itself. The city of God. The city in which God promised to dwell and from which justice would flow throughout the world. The center of all the Jewish hopes and dreams of God's rule upon the earth. But this city that was chosen has done the exact opposite of what God intended it to do. Instead of being a light for justice, it is a place where corruption is rampant. Instead of being a place where God's presence shines forth, it is a place where religious rules has stifled the movement of the spirit of God among the people. It's a symbol of Israel itself that when God sends his prophets to correct these ills, the prophets are mistreated and murdered.

And what is Jesus' response to all of this? It is to say that he has always desired to love and comfort Jerusalem with the fierce, overwhelming love of a mother hen. I am well aware of

the controversies that arise when it comes to gendered language about God and I'm not going to delve deeply into that debate other than to say that Jesus himself seems quite comfortable with the metaphor he uses and I think that shows us that many of us perhaps hold on too strongly to our metaphors that we use for God. God, of course, doesn't have a specific sex or gender and our language always falls short in describing who God is. And this passage simply confronts us with that fact.

So what characteristics of this mothering hen is Jesus trying to convey? First, the mothering hen is actively gathering her children. The mission of Jesus is consistently about gathering all people to him and into a deeper relationship with God. This is what we as Methodists refer to as prevenient grace, that grace that goes before us, constantly seeking to gather us in to God's embrace even before we know God. A mother hen also gathers her chicks as they begin to stray. This gathering continues even as we begin to stray, as we always do, constantly reminding us what we are loved by God, gently pulling us back under God's wing.

Second, the mothering hen will put herself between danger and her chicks. She will put herself in the most vulnerable position for her children. I can tell you from experience, as can anyone who has been a parent, that being a parent puts one into one of the most vulnerable positions that someone can be in. When you are a parent, you would do almost anything, including physical danger, for your child. It's the natural instinct; you see danger heading toward your child, you will run toward that danger. You will put yourself on the line. Being a parent is also an emotionally vulnerable position. When we are young, we don't realize how much what we do can hurt our parents, until we have kids of our own. Then we understand. It's

tough to watch your kids have to grow up, to see them struggle with the hard parts of life. Jesus uses this metaphor to show us that this is the kind of love God has for us. Jesus was willing to face the dangerous fox to attempt to draw all to himself. He was willing to face the cross to demonstrate this love toward us.

However, Jesus acknowledges that not everyone will respond to that love. The people of Jerusalem were “not willing” to be sheltered by the love of God. They resisted and rebelled. We today have the same choice. Do we allow God’s grace and love to shelter us? Do we allow it to gather us together as the people of faith? Or will we become like Jerusalem? A place with so much promise to be a city on the hill that shines for others that has instead become a place of corruption that has rejected God’s love? During our study of *The Walk* this week in our Sunday schools and small groups we will be discussing how to listen to God more closely. I pray that as you listen this week that you will ponder these questions. Allow yourself to be swept up under God’s loving protection and invite others to come do the same. Amen.