

Breaking Open the Word

Lent 2C

16th March, 2025



**The fox waited out
one night**

A weekly reflection and
sermon, with study and
prayer guides following the
RCL Lectionary

Dennis Webster



Revised Common Lectionary

Lent 2C

Genesis 15.1-12, 17-18

Psalm 27

Philippians 3.17 - 4.1

Luke 13.31-35

Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collect

Introduction

Reflection

Discussion Questions

Five Days of Meditation and Prayer

Almighty God,
who seest that we have no power of ourselves
to help ourselves:
Keep us both outwardly in our bodies,
and inwardly in our souls;
that we may be defended from all adversities
which may happen to the body,
and from all evil thoughts
which may assault and hurt the soul: τ
brough Jesus Christ our Lord.

INTRODUCTION

In this sermon, the imagery reflects on the fox and the protective nature of the mother hen as a metaphor for Jesus's journey to Jerusalem.

Parallels are drawn between the fox's cunning, symbolising challenges and threats, and Jesus's unwavering strength as he moves towards his destiny.

The warnings from the Pharisees about Herod, emphasise that Jesus's mission is healing and salvation. He expresses a deep longing to gather and protect his followers like a hen with chicks. This powerful imagery represents Jesus's commitment to his people and his sacrifices for their well-being.

Furthermore, it is challenging for the congregation to recognise the "foxes" in their

community—issues surrounding child and food security, poverty, and broken relationships.

The congregation are encouraged to respond with love and action, drawing inspiration from the metaphor of the mother hen and the Tree of Peace to nurture and protect those in need.

Urging the congregation to come together to support those struggling, all are invited to pray for guidance and actively foster hope within their community, reflecting the transformative power of Christ's love.

Prayer Prompts

- Bring to mind any prayer requests you have with the Parish.
- Ask God to help us see how we can protect those vulnerable in our community.
- Pray for guidance in applying the message of protection and love as Jesus did.
- Seek strength to stand firm in our faith and support each other amid challenges.

God of Creation, breathe into us, made of clay,
your gift of life so that we, made in your image
may become your eyes, ears, hands and voice.

"Pax uobis," quod the fox
"for I am coming to town."

That was a quote from the earliest known English version of "The Fox." When the fox approaches town, it says, "Peace to you."

We've heard many versions of the song. Let me share a few. If you were around then, smile and imagine hearing, "The fox went out on a winter's night."

(1950s): Harry Belafonte, Pete Seeger, and Burl Ives;
(1980s): Jimmy Rogers, Tom Glazer; The Smother Brothers, the Third Doctor, Jon Pertwee;
(1970s): MacLean and MacLean, Roger Whitaker; it was a big hit in the '60s, and Tom Glazer returned!
(1980s): I didn't recognise any performers, but in the '90s, Peter, Paul, Mary, and many others appeared in videos and encores.

And then, in the first century, there was Jesus. "Tell Herod, that old fox, what you see."

That's a stretch, but it wasn't the fox coming to town; it was Jesus himself, determined to go to Jerusalem. Strangely, the Pharisees warned Jesus not to go to Jerusalem because of Herod. This Herod was Herod Antipas, the same one who had John the

Baptist beheaded because of his wife, Herodias, who didn't like that her marriage to his brother was against the law.

On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus gave Herod, through the Pharisees, the answer to the question, "Who are you?" The answer given to Herod's followers was similar to that given to John's disciples.

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 away from Jerusalem (32-3)

Andrew McGowan, the former head of Trinity College, Melbourne, and now of Yale University, sums it all up succinctly. Although it may initially seem baffling, this constitutes an answer to Herod: what absolute authority means, how acts of healing power and his will, Herod.

The story is powerful. Jesus doesn't look for the fox; the fox comes to him. Jesus is in charge now. Just like a mother hen protects her chicks, Jesus protects his people with unwavering strength and determination.

Could we change the traditional song to "The Grey Goose went out on a cold winter night to solve a holy problem?" That might work better in folk songs. But that's what's happening here. The fox, a symbol of cunning and challenges, is no match for the protective power of Jesus.

Right away, Jesus connected with Abram and all the people who followed Israel's prophetic and kingly ministry. As the song says, the fox prays to the moon for light. But the prophecy to Abram was that the lights of every person who lived in the night sky, along with the moon, would shine and herald the glory of God. And guess what? A light shone over Bethlehem in Judea. Astronomers saw it and stopped to ask Herod Antipas's dad, Herod the Great, about the birth of the Messiah, the new King who would save Israel.

Herod knew that someone was coming who would be the greatest and would challenge the established order.

The song that follows today's gospel is filled with sadness for Jerusalem, where God lives. It's the place where the Holy of Holies is, and it's where God's power and wisdom are. But over and over again, it became known as a place where people were weak, and those who were faithful were exploited. It had fallen many times. The first Temple was destroyed. Leaders like Saul, David, and Solomon, who promised much to

God, failed. The people were imprisoned several times. They had to flee into exile, scattered across the lands, and were held captive. God repeatedly gave them answers and solutions, but they refused to listen to what the Lord wanted.

Justice. Mercy. Listening to God.

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 image of protection is like a mother hen guarding her chicks from a fox. Even though it might mean the mother hen's death, it gives her kids a chance to live. This image is super powerful. We see similar things in nature and our community all the time. But we also see some people in our community who act like the fox, not caring about protecting others and sometimes even neglecting the ones they're supposed to care for, like their kids.

The song tells the story of a fox caring for its young by hunting and feeding them. It shows nature not at its worst but as it is. Many of us know that a fox might also hurt innocent animals to get the best

food; it's just part of how things are. Jesus shows the image of a mother hen gathering her chicks, protecting, loving, and taking risks.

Jesus says his mission will end on the 'third day,' and he won't return to Jerusalem until the week before Passover, when the crowd will shout, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" As pilgrims and Easter people, we know how vital this prophecy is. We appreciate how much Jesus went to protect his 'little ones,' and we understand the immense sacrifice he made for us.

Paul writes to the Philippians from his prison cell, reminding them that what we see, say, and do isn't new. What matters is our commitment to and belief in the teachings we've been given. Even though it's hard sometimes, we know that our struggles on earth are nothing compared to the glory that awaits the faithful in God's heavenly kingdom.

Paul writes,

"For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction; their God is the belly; their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹ He will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

⁴⁻¹ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

Stand firm in the Lord.

In our community, fox and hen games are played daily. Throughout the week, many are surprised that serious issues like child and food security exist here. While eager to share their interpretations and solutions, their reasoning often offers superficial fixes, like a band-aid covering a wound, ignoring the underlying cause. As the Gospel of Luke says, this approach allows the issue to resurface at an opportune time, especially concerning evil.

One big problem in our community is the fox's dominance. And where are the mother hens protecting their chicks? Many families, often living in poverty, are stuck in broken relationships, facing long-term unemployment, or have moved without job opportunities. Like the rest of us, they're also bracing for challenges in a post-Trumpian era marked by tariffs and inflation.

We can learn from Jesus by loving our neighbours from the heart. A good place to start is to pray for them. During my visit to the Diocesan Prayer Tree at The Abbey, the image of a mother hen in John Whitleaf Greenier's poem and beloved hymn "Tree of Peace" struck me. The inscription at the tree's base reads, "Tree of Peace. Enfold in our hearts our sister and our brother."

Today, the Parish Council will meet with Anglicare and Wendy Mawoyo, Sheryl, Stuart, Jill, and me, believing they can make a real difference. A powerful image of this partnership is a hen gathering her chicks under the Tree of Peace. In this picture, we express love, live love, care for, nurture, and protect across generations. If we can save even one young life to carry forward into the future,

shining in the glory of Christ, then our joy will be great.

The fox waits for a clear night and, under the Southern Cross, is eager to create chaos, fear, and dysfunction. But we have a choice: to gather together or turn our eyes away and refuse to enter Jerusalem, the Holy City representing the world's hope.

Please pray for the Parish Council. Let's come together and support those who need it most. If you feel called to help, take a moment to calm your mind and ask God for guidance.

Discussion Questions

What does the image of Jesus as a mother hen protecting her chicks reveal about his character and mission compared to the cunning of the fox?

- The sermon shares the powerful metaphor of Jesus comparing himself to a mother hen who protects her young from danger, like the fox.
- How can we embody this protective and nurturing nature in our lives and communities?

In the sermon, it is mentioned that Jerusalem was known for both its history of glory and its failures. How does this duality relate to the broader messages of hope and redemption?

- The sermon discusses how Jerusalem has seen God's power and times of weakness and exploitation.
- Can you imagine a personal experience where you faced setbacks and found hope and redemption?

Paul's letter to the Philippians highlights the difference between earthly desires and our citizenship in heaven. How does this perspective affect our daily choices?

- The sermon refers to Paul's reminder that our true identity and future lie in heaven, not earthly things.
- Can you identify an area where you might be too focused on temporary things instead of more valuable, eternal aspects?

Why do you think Jesus chose not to hide from Herod, who was represented as a fox?

- What does this say about confronting challenges in our own lives?

- The sermon explains that Jesus was determined to face Jerusalem despite the danger posed by Herod, whom the Pharisees warned him about.

How can you apply the courage Jesus showed to face the difficulties you're currently experiencing?

- The sermon mentions the significance of prayer and community support in need.
- How can we create a supportive environment for those in our community facing struggles like food or child security?
- The sermon encourages the congregation to pray and unite to support those vulnerable in their community.
- What actions can you take to support a friend or neighbour in need this week actively?

Discussion Starters

You can discuss these topics to help further the conversation about what they may have learned on Sunday.

- **What does it mean for Jesus to protect us like a mother hen?**
 - This relates to the sermon in which the Pastor talked about how Jesus compared himself to a mother hen, protecting her chicks despite danger.
- **Why was Jesus determined to go to Jerusalem even though it was dangerous?**
 - The sermon explained this determination as Jesus fulfilling his mission and standing firm against challenges, similar to the theme of courage throughout the sermon.
- **How can we be like the mother hen in our community?**
 - This question is inspired by the discussion of community support and care, emphasising the moral duty to protect and nurture one another.
- **What does 'stand firm in the Lord' mean during challenging times?**
 - The sermon highlighted this point, stressing that maintaining faith is crucial, especially in light of community struggles.
- **How can we help struggling families in our community?**
 - This ties back to the sermon, in which the Pastor talked about community issues and our responsibility to respond with love and support.

Walking the sacred earth gently

This five-day devotional will be taking a deeper dive into the sermon from this weekend.

It will explore the themes of protection, love, and the challenges that arise as we strive to follow Jesus's teachings.



Day 1 Luke 13:32-35

In today's scripture, we witness Jesus expressing his deep love for Jerusalem, despite its history of rejecting God's messengers. The imagery of Jesus as a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings brings to light His unwavering care and desire to protect his people.

This powerful metaphor invites us to reflect on our own lives and consider how we respond to the protectiveness of Jesus. Do we allow ourselves to be nurtured and cared for by him, or do we resist His love and protection?

As we think about the challenges we face, both personally and within our communities, let us recognise the role of Jesus as our protector.

Just as the fox represents cunning and danger, we must acknowledge the threats we encounter. However, we can comfort ourselves by knowing that Jesus is there to shelter us. In our moments of struggle, may we lean into his protection and find solace in his embrace.

- How do I perceive Jesus's protective nature in my life?
- In what areas of my life have I resisted His guidance?
- How can I be a source of protection and love to others in my community?
- Pray for the ability to recognise and accept the love and protection Jesus offers.
- Ask God for wisdom in sharing that protective love with others.

Day 2

Philippians 3:18-21

In this passage, Paul highlights the stark contrast between the earthly pursuits of many and the heavenly kingdom that believers are called to. The fox symbolises those primarily driven by self-interest and temporal gain, while the mother hen represents the nurturing love of God. This day invites us to evaluate our priorities.

Are we trapped in the cycle of seeking what this world offers, or are we focusing on our citizenship in heaven?

The Christian life calls for steadfastness and resilience, even when we face trials. We are reminded that we are not alone in our struggles; we belong to a community beyond our earthly realm. Embracing our identity as citizens of heaven encourages us to embody the protective and nurturing qualities of Jesus in our own lives, standing firm in our faith amidst challenges.

- What earthly pursuits are distracting me from my identity as a citizen of heaven?
- How can I remain steadfast in faith despite worldly pressures? - In what ways can I cultivate a nurturing heart toward others?
- Reflect on how to shift your focus from earthly to spiritual pursuits.
- Pray for strength to remain steadfast amid challenges.

Day 3

Luke 19:41-42

Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, expressing His sorrow for a city that has overlooked his message of love and protection. This moment invites us to consider our responses to the calls of God. Do we recognise the areas in our lives or communities

where God invites us to embrace his protection and extend it to others? The mother's hen instinctively gathers her brood, illustrating God has a love for us and the yearning for our hearts to seek him.

Reflecting on our relationship with God, we must ask ourselves if we are willing to embrace his call and share that love with others, particularly those who are vulnerable and in need. Jesus's lament highlights the need to reach out to those who feel neglected or forsaken, ensuring they feel the warmth of God's love through our actions.

- How can I be more attentive to God's call?
- How do I respond to those who feel vulnerable in my community?
- How can I extend God's love and protection to others?

- Pray for an open heart to heed God's call and act accordingly.
- Ask for guidance on how to be a protector in the lives of those around you.

Day 4

Matthew 23:37

Today's scripture emphasises Jesus's longing to gather His people as a hen gathers her chicks. This illustrates God's desire to protect and nurture us. It poses a question: Are we willing to be gathered? Often in our lives, we erect barriers that prevent us from resting under the protective wings of Jesus. These obstacles could be fear, pride, or unresolved issues within ourselves. This day encourages us to lay down our defences and fully embrace the nurturing aspect of God's love. When we surrender to His protection, we receive his love and are called to replicate that love in our communities.

This means actively seeking to protect and nurture those around us struggling or needing encouragement.

- What barriers are preventing me from accepting God's protection?
- How can I become a nurturing presence in my community?
- How can I encourage those around me to seek refuge in Christ?
- Pray for the courage to let go of barriers that hinder God's love in your life.
- Ask for insight into how to be a nurturing figure for others.

Day 5

Isaiah 49:15-16

In our final day of reflection, we consider the depth of God's love and protection. The metaphor here reminds us that God cannot forget us, just as a mother cannot forget her child. It is comforting to know that God's love is unyielding and that He always reaches out to us, even in our most difficult moments. We are called to reflect on the nature of this unwavering love and how we can embody it for others. As we conclude this devotional, let us commit to responding to God's loving call by protecting and serving those around us, particularly those who are marginalised or struggling. We must strive to be vessels of love, ensuring God's presence is felt in our communities as we step out in faith and courage.

- How can I personally resonate with God's unwavering love?
- In what ways am I currently serving as a protector for others?
- How can I further embody God's love in my daily interactions?
- Reflect on how Jesus's example can inspire your actions in the community.
- Pray for the motivation to act as a protector and nurturer in the lives of others.

End notes and further reading

Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke (St Paul's Press)
 The Gospel of Matthew
 The Gospel of John

Tannehill, Robert C, **Narrative Unity Luke Acts Vol: A Literary Interpretation: Volume One: The Gospel According to Luke.**, Augsburg Fortress Publishers 199

N.T. Wright

Andrew's Version: <https://substack.com/@abmcg>

Bible Hub etc



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