

Usually I'm resistant to black and white dualistic imagery (the world has too many grey areas!), but today's gospel lesson does lend itself to this way of teaching. One of my mentors often said: the use of opposites is indeed one way of teaching and learning. I see it as a rhetorical device, as well as a pedagogical method!

So... Jesus was in the midst of his ministry, and in this gospel story (Luke 13) there is a stark, yes, black and white comparison, between Jewish Jesus and Roman ruler Herod. Jesus happens to use barnyard images to help us see the difference. He called Herod a fox, and he compared himself to a mother hen! As it is today, foxes were considered to be sly and dangerous... yes, stealing and killing in hen houses. Herod was fox-like, and, wanting to kill Jesus, he could be considered an "anti-Christ." In stark comparison, Jesus says He is like a mother hen, wanting to protect her chicks (all God's children) under her wings.

Before we get to the "good part," (the wonderful protection of God or Jesus as a mother hen), just a few more words about that fox! The fox in question was not the same Herod we hear about at Christmastime. That was Herod the Great, who wanted to kill the baby Jesus with the help of the "Wise Men." This Herod is his son, Herod Antipas, who was not called King Herod; he only had jurisdiction over the Galilee area and was known to be desperate for more power. As such, anyone talking about a "new kingdom," and gaining a large following, was a sure threat to Herod's power. But we know that Jesus was never a military threat. He was clear with any followers that his "kingdom" was not of this world and that his followers did not take up arms and rule by brutal force, like the Roman Emperors. He was not the Fox that killed, but the Hen that gathered and protected little chicks. The human analogy is that he came for the lost, the vulnerable, the poor.

A few more words about what Jesus was up against: the brute force of Rome, a dictatorial, authoritarian empire. We in America are no stranger to this. Quoting Diana Butler Bass: *Christian nationalism, the religion supporting our dictatorial president, is espoused by those who are clearly*

*NOT willing to give themselves to a vulnerable prophet. They don't want a loving shelter; they want revenge and vengeance. Christian nationalism is built on a theology of a hyper-masculine warrior-Jesus and an explicit rejection of anything they believe "feminizes" God. They insist on a "muscular" faith to defeat their enemies. Jesus has become, as one writer described it, "a kick-ass action hero."*

This morning's gospel story comes from the gospel according to Luke, which is considered to be the most compassionate gospel, espousing a compassionate Jesus, especially for the poor or marginalized. Luke has "The Magnificat," the song of Mary, who said God has "regarded the low estate of his handmaiden," (this peasant girl.) Luke includes shepherds at the manger, and shepherds were often looked down upon as not respectable, sometimes grazing their flocks on other people's land! Luke has the prodigal son story, about amazing merciful love for a wayward son, who spent all his inheritance on decadent living. Luke has the story of the Good Samaritan, that foreigner, who helped the robbed and beaten man in the ditch. At the end the gospel of Luke, we hear a story of grace, the story of the "good thief" who recognizes and receives God's mercy while dying on a cross next to Jesus.

This story is about Jesus facing the "powers that be," and staying dedicated in his mission to transform the world with love and justice, to bring His kind of "Kingdom" to a hurting world. Whether we like it or not, this story is political in nature, about power, competition for power, and the abuse of power, as with Herod. In contrast, Jesus spoke of a "Kingdom" where all God's children, (especially the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed) are protected and cared for. This is a challenge, an affront to the "powers that be."

We all love the personal nature of Jesus' Good News, He is indeed the "Good shepherd" for each of us, and the "Mother hen" for each of us, and we can continue personal transformation all of our days, growing more in grace. But Jesus was clearly also about *societal* transformation, resisting the Roman Empire, those who ruled by brute force. Jesus dismissed Herod

Antipas as powerless to stop him from his mission to bring about *God's* kind of rule... Jesus said "Go tell that fox for me that I will continue casting out evil, caring for and healing people." Jesus was showing his power, an unusual kind of power, the power of inclusive love, the power of honoring every person, a power that is "shared" power!

Looking at our national situation for a moment... speaking of "shared" power, is it not obvious that we as a country are getting dangerously close to authoritarian, dictatorial rule?" Or oligarchical rule? As I wrote to our newspaper, "*How is it that billionaires living far from streets of poverty, far from the faces of the poor, are the ones who get to decide which social programs are worthy and which are wasteful?*" Was it not our original goal to have *three* parts of government? Is it not the house of representatives that has the most complete understanding of the needs of all Americans?

Let's be clear that Jesus loved *all* God's children. As such, "diversity" is a good word, and "inclusiveness" is a good word. So I'm 100% for the D and the I of DEI! I admit that I don't have a thoroughly studied view of the word "equity," and I know that achieving "equity" is a complex issue, perhaps an impossible goal. I know it is not the same as "equality" and that it has more to do with *opportunities*, especially economic or educational ones. (If qualifications or merit are more or less equal, and that is a complex judgment call, it can be a good thing to offer a job or education to someone whose parents or grandparents were enslaved... to offer an opportunity to someone whose race or gender has continually been discriminated against.) I think DEI considerations should not be mandated (nor banned as some want) by federal law. But since God made a diverse creation and Jesus showed inclusive love, we do our best, as a *moral* imperative, to honor all people and include all people.

Let me conclude with this wonderful image of Jesus as Mother Hen, gathering all the chicks. Jesus, besides naming and confronting what is evil in this world, was all about love and mercy and compassion. We are to receive and spread this persistently as Jesus did. This is true power. Love

is indeed stronger than hate, stronger than death. Love can be infectious and grow as Jesus says, 10 fold and 100 fold!

And, of course I want to end by singing a song...by one of our genuinely Christlike troubadours ... that speaks of a "love-born revolution"... where mercy grows like gardens and loving takes the lead!" This song, called "The Real Thing," is by Ken Medema.

*I want to see a church where it sounds and smells like welcome. People meet beyond the walls of race and clan and creed. I want to see a church where Mercy grows like gardens. Hope and help meet hand in hand and loving takes the lead. I want to see a church come alive in every culture, speaking peace in every language, hope in every tongue. Alive with conversation, communion, and connection, words of love are spoken here, and pathos, and passion can be sung! **Chorus: I want to see the real thing. I want to see the big deal. I want to see the God-life that can turn a soul around. I want to feel the spirit. I want to hear the music. I want to see the God-power that can break the barriers down. I don't want to see another institution with platitudes and promises and pretty songs to sing. All I want to see is a love-born revolution. All I want to see is the real thing.***

*I want to see a church where everybody matters. Everyone, no matter who, has special gifts to give. I want to see a church to help me find my place of service. We give, receive, belong, believe and that is how we live! I want to see a church all dressed in generosity, where giving is delight and people run to sacrifice. I want to see a church where no one ever goes without. No matter how much love may cost, people run to pay the price. I want to see a church who dares to speak with honesty. No clever lies, no compromise, no dumbing down. I want to see a church who will tell the truth to everyone: the high, the low, the rich, the poor, the criminal and the crown. **Chorus***