

2ND SUNDAY IN LENT
February 28, a.D. 2010
Luke 13: 31 – 38

We are heading for Jerusalem. That's where Jesus is going. He is on the move and he is a man on a mission. His goal of reaching Jerusalem may sound reasonable at first, since Jerusalem is the Holy City, the Capital City, the city of the Temple of the Living God. But the reason Jesus is headed for Jerusalem is shocking and unbelievable. It goes beyond our thinking. It shows that God's ways are nowhere near the way of man.

Jesus is headed for Jerusalem because that's where the prophets of God are killed. Right there in the Holy City is where the blood of the prophets runs down the streets. The city where worshippers are to gather in the house of God and call on his holy name for help is where God's prophets are silenced in death. Strange indeed are the ways of God. Who could ever figure him out?

Satan tried to keep Jesus from going to Jerusalem to die. He tempted Jesus to turn stone into bread. He spoke through Peter who said there is no way that the glorious Messiah of Israel would be humiliated and crucified. Now the Pharisees, who were jealous of Jesus and hated him, came to him with a warning that he should stay away from Jerusalem because King Herod is trying to kill him.

The house of Herod already tried to kill the infant Jesus when the baby boys of Bethlehem were slaughtered by the king's command. But both the Pharisees and King Herod were not moved by the love of God. Rather it was the love of self that motivated them.

We have such people in our own time, people who seek their own advantage and use others only to secure that interest. Some of them occupy visible seats of power. Some of them are beloved leaders. Some of these people are not among the rich and famous. They work in our offices, teach in our schools, worship in our churches, and live in our homes. They may rightly claim that they seek the best interests of others, the advantages of those nearest and dearest to them, but, in reality, they are controlled by

self-interest, that base motive which has something to say about all our actions, leaving none of us without condemnation.

We are all about power, so it is best not to point the finger. It is better to beat one's breast in confession and repentance. Jesus minces no words. He knows exactly what's going on in the self-serving, conniving of those who seek to control, so he calls Herod the fox he really is! "Herod may want me to do this or that," he says, "but I have my own agenda. I have various healings to take care of and then I'm heading for Jerusalem, the holy city, where they kill the prophets!" Jesus goes to Jerusalem because the foxes of this world want to have their way.

Foxes are interesting animals that are noted for being cute and smart. The Greek poet Aesop living in the 6th century B.C., wrote many of his fables about foxes who tricked others into doing it's will. That's why Jesus compared Herod to a fox. But foxes only appear to be sly and cunning. The truth about foxes is they only appear that way because they are always hungry. But in fact they are opportunists and scavengers. If they were truly that intelligent, then why do so many of them end up as road kill?

Herod ended up exiled Lyon in 39 a. D. by Caesar and disgraced. The Pharisees who claimed inherited privilege and an untouchable self-righteousness, lost their control over people when the temple in Jerusalem was knocked to the ground in 70 a.D.. Those in our own world, ourselves included, who insist on controlling others to promote self, find out that ultimately, control is lost. The reign of the fox is sometimes brilliant and flashy, but inevitably short. The fox is not destined to have his way.

Jesus compares himself to another unlikely sort of animal, a mother hen. When you think of all the animals with which he could have compared himself, it is quite interesting that Jesus chooses the hen. Not only is there a lovely allusion to a mother hen gathering her chicks in these words. There is also something bold and brave here which other animals could not represent for us. When the hen attacks, there are no fangs, no claws, no tearing of flesh. If the fox wants her chicks, he will have to kill her first—wings spread, breast exposed. And this is exactly what happens. She is there, in a new form of

power and leadership, as the one for others, the servant leader, the one whose extravagant love considers the welfare of the lost foremost. Thus the means of survival over against the attack of the wily foxes of this world is provided not by retaliation or brute force, but by gathering the innocent, the victims, into a community where the love of the mother hen lives on even after her death.

Through the proclamation of his death and resurrection, Jesus gathers his own into a new Jerusalem, a different one, a heavenly Jerusalem, which is the church. He doesn't take human merit, politics or popularity into consideration when he gathers but the simply and humble yet holy washing in baptism where the sinful flesh is crucified and the new man of faith arises, joined to Lord himself.

His is a kingdom not of power or politics but of his victorious life, the very life of God given to his children. And now when that gathering happens you can hear them say "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," which happens right here at his altar when our Lord comes to feed us with his body and blood in the new Jerusalem. Jerusalem is where we are headed and where we are as the body of Christ.