

# Sermon for Sunday, March 13, 2022

Second Sunday in Lent

“Mother Hen God”

Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Decorah, Iowa

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Our Psalm for today has gotten me thinking about fear. The Psalmist sounds so confident - God's got me, why should I fear? Umm, I could give you a few answers: Putin and global warming, long Covid and cancer, violence around us and within our own hearts. Also, I just heard about parachute spiders that can fly on their own webs? I did not want to know about them.

There is plenty to fear.

How can we live with courage and strength in such a challenging time? Maybe we should try to be more like Jesus in our Gospel reading today. The Pharisees come to him and say: You better leave town, Herod's out to get you. Jesus replies, oh yeah, well I'm too busy to be afraid. I've got work to do. I've got to cast out demons, perform cures, and be on my way. I've got to face some angry and violent people in Jerusalem. Herod has already killed Jesus' cousin John, but Jesus says, you tell that fox Herod that fear isn't going to get in my way. Jesus has guts. He's got moxie. I want to be more like that. I wish we could all be more like that in the face of the Herods and dangers in our lives.

But I don't think our hope lies in just trying to be like Jesus here. We're not Jesus. And honestly, hearing that Jesus was fearless doesn't help me to not be afraid. We need more than a great example, more than inspiration. So maybe we just need more trust that God will protect us. God's got us, no need to fear. And yet the image Jesus gives us for God today is also not as reassuring as I'd like.

Jesus describes himself as a mother hen, God as a mother hen who wants to gather us, her chicks, under her wings. When foxes like Herod stalk, when the violence within us threatens to tear us all apart, God longs to draw us close into her downy breast. This is a beautiful picture but it's also not an easy answer to the problem of fear. Because, a mother hen can't actually prevent a fox from killing her chicks. Hens can be incredibly fierce and ferocious when their chicks are in harm's way. I wouldn't want to mess with one. Yet if a fox is determined to eat a chicken, it will find a way. God as Mother Hen doesn't mean that God is going to keep bad things from happening to us.

As preacher Nadia Bolz-Weber points out,<sup>1</sup>“Nothing actually keeps danger from being dangerous ... Faith in God does not bring you safety. The fox still exists. Danger still exists. So where does that leave us?” She asks. “If danger is real, and a hen can't actually keep their chicks out of danger, then what good is this image of God as Mother Hen if faith in her can't make us safe?” Maybe, she wonders, “Maybe it's not *safety* that keeps us from being afraid. Maybe it's *love*.”

---

<sup>1</sup> Nadia Bolz-Weber sermon entitled "Be Not Afraid" <--(um, yeah...ok)  
<https://thecorners.substack.com/p/be-not-afraid-um-yeahok>

Jesus doesn't promise safety. Instead, Jesus gives us incredibly powerful, vulnerable love. As author Debie Thomas puts it,<sup>2</sup> "What Jesus the Mother Hen offers is not the absence of danger, but the fullness of his unguarded, open-hearted, wholly vulnerable self in the face of all that threatens and scares us. What he gives is his own body, his own life. Wings spread open, heart exposed, shade and warmth and shelter at the ready. What he promises, at great risk to himself, is the making of his very being into a place of refuge and return for his children - for all of his children, even the ones who want to stone and kill him."

This love, this place of refuge and return, changes everything for us, even as foxes still lurk. Our Mother Hen God doesn't keep foxes from being dangerous, our Mother Hen God keeps the foxes from determining how we experience life. Because of this incredible love, the foxes and dangers do not get to determine the contours of our hearts, nor the content of our minds. Because of this love, we can love. And, as Nadia Bolz-Weber puts it, "Maybe the opposite of fear isn't bravery. Maybe the opposite of fear is love. Paul tells us that perfect love casts out fear. So, in the response to our own Herods, in response to the very real dangers of this world we have an invitation as people of faith: which is to respond by loving."

Ultimately, I think that's why Jesus sounds so confident when he says tell Herod I'm too busy to be afraid. I think it is love more than guts or moxie that helps him to keep showing compassion to keep on keeping on. Jesus knows that he is held in God always and forever, no matter what happens. When threats come, he can continue to love because he is loved always and forever.

Amid all the threats and dangers of our lives, we, too, are defined by something other than fear. We are defined by the love of our Mother Hen God. And nothing can stop God from loving us. Nothing: not our own resistance, not the violence within or around us, not Herods or dangers or even death, nothing can stop God from loving us. As the apostle Paul puts it, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This love is our refuge and strength.  
From this refuge, we can live with love.

---

<sup>2</sup> Debie Thomas, "I Have Longed" Lectionary Essay at [www.journeywithjesus.net](http://www.journeywithjesus.net)