

Luke 13:31-35

Last week in France a fox found its way into a henhouse, obviously looking for a meal. But the hens ganged up on the fox and pecked it to death. Its body, full of peck holes, was discovered the next morning. In this news story the roles are reversed so that the predator becomes the prey. But I doubt if this unique incident will keep foxes out of henhouses. And it certainly won't keep the spiritual fox out of God's henhouse.

Jesus refers to Herod as a fox in our text. He is a cunning ruler with a predatory appetite. But the real predator behind Herod is the devil. Herod is simply his puppet. Satan has many such puppets, cunning foxes all of them, and he uses them to devour God's chickens.

And that's where we come in. Maybe you'd rather be called a fox, at least you women might prefer it. But that would make us predators. It's not very flattering to be called a chicken, but this is how Jesus describes us in our text.

Now before we begin to puff ourselves up just a bit, thinking of those hens in France who became heroines, keep in mind that we are not hens; we are baby chicks. We are His "brood" is how Jesus puts it. He is the hen.

In France, had that henhouse not had full grown hens in it but only baby chicks, the story would have turned out differently. A baby chick is defenseless. Something, or someone, must protect it. This is the task and privilege of the mother hen. She protects her chicks in two ways. First she warns her chicks of danger. Second she lifts her wings under which her chicks are protected. She does it all. Without a mother hen to protect them, the baby chicks are fox food.

The same is true for us. Without our mother hen we are an easy meal for the devil's foxes. But we don't think so. And when I say "we," I include us with the people of Jerusalem. For what dwelled in them dwells also in us. They caused Jesus to lament and weep. He was their mother hen. He gave birth to them, and He was their protector. But they wanted no part of Him. They had always been that way. Whichever prophet God sent to warn them they killed. So it's not surprising that they turn away from Jesus. "We don't need to run under His wings. We are children of Abraham. No fox can touch us!" This is their attitude.

And that attitude lives today, just in a different form. Our pedigree is not Abraham but perhaps it's Martin Luther. Or it's our years of service in the church. The one I hear a lot is, "I have faith; I'm in no danger." Now it's good to have faith. In fact it's essential. It's good to serve in the church. And it's good to appreciate our Lutheran heritage. Except when we start believing that such things render us immune to danger.

Friends, we're baby chicks. We're not Jesus. We have no business trying to peck at the fox. When the fox is near, there is one place for us to run. Not to our proud pedigree but under Jesus' wings. Only the mother hen senses danger, not her chicks. So when the mother hen lifts her wings, it's time to run underneath them.

Do you see why Jesus weeps in our text? Whenever He lifted His wings, the people of Jerusalem turned away from Him. He was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows. Yet He still lifted His wings even unto the day He was crucified.

Maybe a question we should ask ourselves...each one of us should...is this, "Do I cause Jesus to lament and weep?" Well, when He lifts His wings, do I come running? He doesn't weep over the sin in our life. What makes our Savior weep is when we don't come running under His wings for the forgiveness of our sin. The people of Jerusalem were great sinners. Yet Jesus lamented not at their sinfulness, but at their refusal to come to the one who loved them and forgave them.

Some of the saddest words Jesus uttered are here in our text. "*You would not.*" "*How often,*" He says, "*would I have gathered (you) under (My) wings, and you would not!*" God's grace can be resisted. And it often is. If His grace could not be resisted, we'd have to somehow add more pews. For then every time Jesus would lift His wings, His chicks would come running here to receive His gracious gifts. He would never lament with the words, "*You would not!*" He would never shed a tear over your life and mine...if His grace could not be resisted.

The one who should shed tears is me, and you. Tears of repentance. Sorrow over our own disobedience. Over our many refusals to come when Jesus lifts His wings for us.

So back to our question. "Do you...do I bring Jesus' tears?" Yes. Look to your baptism. Here in the font are Jesus' tears; tears of joy over you. You are His baby chick; His precious child. He washed you with His tears in your baptism. You are clean...all of you. He declares you forgiven..each one of you. Here He shelters you from danger. He protects you from Satan's foxes. Here you are safe with your mother hen.

So when you, the baptized, gather here to receive Jesus' gifts, the foxes go hungry. They can snarl at you, and they do. But here where you hide under Jesus' wings, there is protection for you.

So why would we ever leave? Well sadly the baby chicks can peck at each other. And they do...we do. Some chicks become offended and leave the safety of Jesus' wings. Others get bored under His wings. Some get lured away by the enticements of the world.

Let's not think less of such as these. No baby chick has the right to be proud. All we have is by God's grace, including our place under His wings. He brought us here. And He can bring them back here. So we pray and we encourage. Sometimes we need to rebuke a stubborn chick. But always in love.

We want the foxes to go hungry. And the only way is to remain under Jesus' wings. And as we do, we invite others, we compel others. There is room for all sinners under Jesus' wings. Amen.