

This is one of my favorite Gospel passages, because it depicts God and Jesus as a mother figure. Which, of course, is good news for me because I am a mother, I have a mother, and I know people who mother others.

Now, don't get me wrong, I like fathers as well, I am married to an excellent father and I have the very best father in the world. I am sorry for the rest of you; I guess you can be third or fourth.

It is common to think of our God as a Father, the one who protects and sustains our life. Our Heavenly Father is gracious, forgiving our sins and inequity. We only have to look at the stories of the Old Testament to see this: who forgave David for his lapse with Bathsheba? Who protected David during his many battles? Who gave Isaiah the words of warning to bring people back to God's ways? Of course, it was God the Father. However, God cannot be limited to one image or one way to give grace. In our passage today, we see God as protective: offering grace while mourning for our waywardness. Today, Jesus gives us grace as a mother figure.

"How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"<sup>1</sup>

The image of Jesus as a protector is not new, however, the image of Jesus as a mother might feel a bit uncomfortable. Yet, many of you have mothers who can be quite fierce; they might be trailblazers in ways you never thought of: going hours without sleep when a child is sick, standing up for a child who has special needs, or working tirelessly to ensure their children receive the best life.

All of these mothers wish to shield their children from pain, however, like Jesus they cannot. Pain is part of life as imperfect humans. My brothers and sisters in Christ, we are beautifully imperfect. Though our Savior cannot shield us from pain, he can give us the tools to be strong in the face of our obstacles.

Jesus glorifies God throughout his ministry, particularly before this "warning" from the Pharisees. Jesus persists despite their warning. While the parables of the open door and mustard seed preceding this text appear in the other Gospels, the story of Jesus calling Herod a fox is unique to Luke's Gospel. It is important to recognize that Luke's community is composed of people who would have experienced the repressive power of Rome. The image of pain is particularly poignant as it is only mentioned once in Luke's gospel as opposed to the six times that it is mentioned in Matthew's gospel. Jesus is telling the hearer a continuous message: the small can do much and the open door is closing. Both of these messages are important. In preparing for Jesus' death then and now, we need to hear words and comfort and warning spoken simultaneously. They need to hear that out of their faith can grow great things. The community also needs to hear that the best path to God is through a relationship with Christ.

This is a discussion on what our nature should be: to receive grace from God it is better to be a protective hen rather than a sly fox.<sup>2</sup> We must identify the foxes in our lives: we likely do not have a Herod, perhaps it is a practice that is unhealthy. Perhaps it is something else.

When people try to put us down, Christ lifts us up.

We can find grace in moments where we recognize that we do not live up to God's standards.<sup>3</sup> The image of a mother is strong, protective, and unconditional. This passage reminds

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 13:34

<sup>2</sup> <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/working-preachers-sermon-brainwave/id282364902?i=1000451366253>

<sup>3</sup> <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/working-preachers-sermon-brainwave/id282364902?i=1000451366253>

us as Christians to see the difference between worldly leaders and heavenly: the worldly put dominion over and the heavenly protect us and lament over our rejection of the Godly ways.<sup>4</sup>

The role of Jesus is one of mother protecting and drawing close to all of Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> It is a tender image, one that may remind you of your mother drawing you close. Or the way someone has mothered you in your life.

Last week, Fr. Roman, certainly a prophet to this parish, gave us a rousing sermon about staying true to our Christian narrative. It is far too easy to fall into the trap of leaning into secular values. I have to admit, that Fr. Roman's sermon made me, a newly ordained priest, a little uncomfortable. We find Fr. Roman generally amiable and so we will not physically harm him or stone him. It would be easy to scoff at his sermon and say, 'surely not I...'. Yet when my friends tell me Sunday is there day for family or rest, I try to be understanding when I know, in truth it is the Sabbath day and we must keep it Holy.

It is important to keep in mind: Jesus's image of a mother is strong, protective, and unconditionally loving.<sup>6</sup> It is not a mother who hides and swoons away, but rather a mother who protects from the dangers of the world. This mothering image sees a certain honesty. Jesus expresses frustration at Jerusalem's lack of ability to embrace prophets.<sup>7</sup>

The prophets brought messages to stave off danger rather than embrace it. The antithesis of the mother hen is the fox; the image of someone who sneakily goes into prey on others. Jesus knows that Herod, the fox, is little more than a thief.<sup>8</sup>

In some ways, Jesus is not insulting Herod as much as we perceive. Centuries later a fox sounds as though it is a terrible insult, indeed, it is not a compliment. In Jesus' time it was both not as insulting and a double one: Herod is rotten, however, he is not the top prey that he imagines himself to be - and in fact perhaps the Hen is able to overcome the fox in this instance.

You see, Jesus is saying to the Pharisees that he is tougher than he looks. As we know, Jesus is more than his enemies imagine. Jesus is the ultimate authority.

Our image of motherhood is not truly unique for God, it is found throughout the Old Testament. Jesus' image reminds us of the Psalms<sup>9</sup> and reminds us of the grace allowed under God's protection.<sup>10</sup>

In a world of hate and rejection of Christain values, we must remember: God is gracious to us even when we stray. It gives me hope to reflect upon Christ yearning to tuck us under his wing. Christ wants to shield us from the foxes that lurk in the world and wish us harm. May we take comfort in this divine protection. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/working-preachers-sermon-brainwave/id282364902?i=1000451366253>

<sup>5</sup> Edwards, J.R. (2015).The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke. Nottingham: Apollos.

<sup>6</sup> Edwards, J.R. (2015).The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke. Nottingham: Apollos.

<sup>7</sup> Edwards, J.R. (2015).The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke. Nottingham: Apollos.

<sup>8</sup> Edwards, J.R. (2015).The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke. Nottingham: Apollos.

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 51:1-2; Psalm 139:1-3; Psalm 18:1-3; Psalm 100:5; etc.

<sup>10</sup> Edwards, J.R. (2015).The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke. Nottingham: Apollos.