

**ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA**

March 13, 2022 – LENT 2, YEAR C

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Homily: *“Trusting the Hen to Protect us From the Fox”**

Genesis 15:1–12, 17–18	(God makes an everlasting covenant with Abraham)
Psalm 27:10–18	(A plea for God’s mercy and help)
Philippians 3:17—4:1	(Our true citizenship is in heaven with Christ)
St. Luke 13:31–35	(Jesus prophesies about His death in Jerusalem)

Just as, in this Lenten season, we are journeying toward Good Friday and Calvary’s Hill, Jesus is on His way to be crucified in Jerusalem. As today’s Gospel lesson opens, our Lord is traveling through either Galilee or Perea, territories under the jurisdiction of King Herod.¹ You may remember that the murderous Herod has already executed John the Baptist. And now we read in verses 31 to 33 a detail unique to St. Luke: “Some Pharisees” come to warn Jesus to leave the area because Herod is “seeking to kill” Him. Seriously? Prior to this, Luke has consistently portrayed the Pharisees as strong opponents of Jesus, often attempting to entrap Him. And yet, when we dig deeper, we find that Jesus and the Pharisees may have been closer than one might think.

The late Jacob Neusner, a distinguished Jewish scholar, pointed out that of all the sects within Judaism, the Pharisees seemed to have the most in common with John the Baptist and Jesus: Zealousness for God; devotion to keeping Israel’s covenant with the Lord; a desire to see Israel saved by the Messiah; and belief in angels, demons, and the resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees criticized Jesus precisely on those points they held in common, from which they believed He had strayed. After all, they wouldn’t have expected the Sadducees or the Samaritans to observe their rules about temple worship, table fellowship, or ritual cleanliness.²

Likewise, Jesus expected more from the Pharisees than from the other sects, so perhaps it’s no coincidence that two of His greatest disciples—St. Joseph of Arimathea and St. Paul of Tarsus—were Pharisees.

Although Christ was often tough with His opponents, and they could be quite contentious toward Him, neither side lost all respect for the other. And so, we see a group of Pharisees overcoming their tensions with Jesus to give Him a warning they think He needs to hear: “Leave this place. Go away, because Herod wants to kill you.”

Unfortunately, Jesus’ reply is not as courteous: “Go away yourselves,” He barks, “and tell that fox”—meaning Herod—that I need to finish the work of healing and deliverance the Father gave me to do, before I go to Jerusalem to die. Why would Jesus send them back to Herod? The Pharisees were not speaking on his behalf. But Jesus wants Herod—and the Pharisees—to know that He has no fear of anyone, because Herod is not in charge of Jesus’ life or death—only God is.

After this somewhat unusual exchange, Jesus utters a cry of lament for the city that has, time after time, rejected God’s messengers, the prophets. *His* appeals to them have been ignored, too. And, although He will pass through the city’s gates to joyful shouts of “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” that acclamation will quickly turn to “Crucify him!” Even so, Our Lord loves the people of Jerusalem. He likens them to wayward chicks that need the protective embrace of a mother hen. Such loving compassion in the face of harsh opposition is truly the merciful love of God, of which we are all in need.

Here is Jesus, going to His death in Jerusalem, where He will face rejection by the city that refused God's prophets in the past. Yet, despite humanity's stubbornness, faithlessness, and cruelty, Jesus characterizes Himself as a loving mother hen, who only wants to gather her brood under her wings to shelter them from hurt and harm.

Donald Armentrout, a noted scholar of Episcopal history and theology, commented: "Who hasn't seen a child, after being hurt or picked on by siblings, run up to his or her mother. The mother scoops the child in her arms, and draws her offspring close to her body, offering comfort and protection. Today's Scripture describes God as a parent, using the metaphor of a protective bird whose holy wings provide refuge and shelter."³

Once again, we see the unconditional, boundless mercy of God, as Jesus puts into practice what He teaches in Matthew 5:44: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." This is the same merciful love that would motivate Christ to say from the Cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Every one of us needs this mercy and grace—desperately! So how do we get it? Certainly, not by meriting it. In one of His revelations of Divine Mercy, Christ spoke to St. Faustina of Poland saying: "I have opened My Heart as a living fountain of mercy. Let all souls draw life from it. Let them approach this sea of mercy with great trust. ... I am offering people a vessel with which they are to keep coming for graces to the fountain of mercy. ... The graces of My mercy are drawn by means of one vessel only, and that is—trust. The more a soul trusts, the more it will receive."⁴

Our Lord reminded St. Faustina that we can depend upon His love, and that He alone is worthy of our trust. "I would never reject a contrite heart," Jesus told her, "Sooner would heaven and earth turn into nothingness than would My mercy not embrace a trusting soul."⁵

Trust means we agree to let God be God, instead of trying to run and control everything ourselves. It means we allow God to re-write the pages of our lives, instead of insisting on our own script.

It means we agree with the great pledge we make each time we say the Lord's Prayer: "Thy will be done (not mine) on earth as it is in heaven." It means that even in our moments of greatest agony, we agree with Jesus' cry in the Garden, "Not my will, but Thine be done" (Lk. 22:42).⁶

We typically view Lent as a time for repentance and spiritual discipline. But these acts of penitence and self-denial would be meaningless without God's mercy and forgiveness. So, I believe God is calling us, as we walk our Lenten journey, to use this as a time in which to increase our trust in Jesus, to lean upon Him in our weakness and doubts, and to allow Him to shelter us under His wings when the "fox" is after us, too—in whatever form that crafty beast may appear.

St. Ignatius of Loyola wrote in the 16th century: "There are very few people who realize what God would make of them if they abandoned themselves into His hands, and let themselves be formed by His grace."⁷

This Lent, may God grant us the courage and humility to abandon ourselves into His merciful hands, that we might be transformed by His loving grace. Amen.

^{*} Adapt. N. George-Hacker, "The Fox and the Hen," 24 February 2013, St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, Cobleskill NY. Used with permission.

¹ "The Gospel According to St. Luke," *The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VIII* (New York: Abingdon, 1952), p. 248.

² Adapt. Thomas S. Armentrout, qtd. "Journey Toward Jerusalem," *Synthesis, Year C* (24 February 2013), p. 2.

³ "Journey," *op. cit.* p. 4.

⁴ St. Faustina, *Diary*, 1520, 327, 1578 qtd. "Trust – Completely Trust in Jesus," [TheDivineMercy.org](http://thedivinemercy.org/message/spirituality/trust.php) <<http://thedivinemercy.org/message/spirituality/trust.php>> 11 February 2013.

⁵ St. Faustina, *Diary*, 1485, 1777, *op. cit.*

⁶ "Trust – Completely Trust in Jesus," [TheDivineMercy.org](http://thedivinemercy.org/message/spirituality/trust.php) <<http://thedivinemercy.org/message/spirituality/trust.php>> 11 February 2013.

⁷ St. Ignatius, qtd. "Journey Toward Jerusalem," *Synthesis, Year C* (24 February 2013), p. 3.