



One of our NETworX friends, Carl,  
is in charge of the chickens  
at First Methodist Church.

Carl is the most attentive  
chicken manager you've ever met.  
He'll refer to the chickens as, *his ladies*  
in casual conversation.  
And if you don't know  
that Carl is talking about chickens,  
he sounds a bit like a different type  
of proprietor altogether.

But you know right away that, Carl  
loves his job.

He will correct you if you call them merely chickens,  
they are, he slowly chides, The First Ladies.  
He is attentive to them,  
he knows their habits and personalities.

He has his favorites,

Samantha, Gloria and Elizabeth.

They eat greens and corn  
but they will tear into  
a watermelon, he told me.  
Carl has a moped and he swears  
they can hear his scooter  
coming a block away.



Some friends of ours had chickens  
for a little over year, in their backyard—in Hillcrest!  
It took their dog, Ozzie,

a little while to get used to their presence,  
what with the awkward running gait and the pecking.  
One of my professors at seminary  
had chickens too.  
In the middle of Atlanta!  
So when I found out that this professor,  
had gotten her chickens from none other than,  
Barbara Brown Taylor,  
well this happened:



In case you can't tell,  
we are holding said chickens.

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem  
...How often have I desired  
to gather your children together  
as a hen gathers her brood under her wings,  
and you were not willing!”

Though I've held a chicken,  
I'm not terribly familiar with them.  
But in our scripture,  
especially in the Psalms,  
there are several references to birds—

Ps 17:8, “Guard me as the apple of your eye,  
hide me in the shadow of your wings”;

and Ps. 57:1, “in the shadow of your wings  
I will take refuge  
until the destroying storms pass by”;

and Ps. 91:4, “God will cover you with his feathers,  
and under his wings you will find refuge.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://juniaproject.com/biblical-maternal-images-for-god/>



There seems to be a running theme  
about God, birds and protection.

You might be familiar with the verse from Isaiah,  
“but those who wait for the Lord  
shall renew their strength,  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles...” (40:31)

Apparently mother eagles  
push their eaglets out of the nest  
when the time comes to teach them to fly.  
But then they will catch them  
before the babies fall to their doom.<sup>2</sup>  
Even that sounds like the character of God.

This passage this morning is so nature-y.  
Not only are we talking about hens and chicks  
but we are talking about foxes too.  
I wonder what a mixture of emotions  
Jesus must have been feeling  
as he hears a death threat from Herod Antipas,  
whom he refers to as a fox.  
Which even in the ancient world,  
being called a fox isn't a compliment.  
*You go and tell that fox,  
I'm going to keep on doing  
what I'm here to do.*

Jesus, you've got hutzpah.  
I would think it takes some real courage  
to say that—I mean *this is the* Herod  
who beheaded John the Baptist.

---

<sup>2</sup> ibid

Courageously, boldly, Jesus responds to Herod:  
I will keep doing the things I've set out to do—  
'Listen, I am casting out demons  
and performing cures today, tomorrow  
and on the third day I finish my work.'

So basically, "The things being finished  
are Jesus' day-by-day works of God's kingdom:  
healings and exorcisms.  
[And though he has leveled a threat]  
Herod is just a clever little fox;  
God is [the one] in charge."<sup>3</sup>

The fact Jesus refuses to let Herod,  
Pharisees, disciples, or anyone  
deter him from his calling  
is nothing short of *courageous*.

Courage is one of those words that,  
thanks to Brené Brown,  
has gotten a whole lot of attention lately.  
Here Jesus shows us a type of courage  
that is not simply acted in a single moment,  
like pulling someone out of the road  
from being hit by a car;

but rather a type of courage  
in anticipating a significant, daunting,  
or even frightening challenge  
and not turning away from it.

Not only does Jesus refuse to turn away  
but he resolves meet to the challenge it head on.<sup>4</sup>  
Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem  
and must be on his way.

This is courage.

---

<sup>3</sup> David Schnasa Jacobsen [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3990](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3990)

<sup>4</sup> David Lose, <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/02/lent-2-c-courage-and-vulnerability/>

“[Brené] Brown reminds us that  
[the word] courage comes from the Latin *cor* – “heart” –  
and defines courage as  
living from the heart,  
the willingness to embrace  
our vulnerability in order to be our authentic selves.”<sup>5</sup>

This is what we see in Jesus,  
a living from the heart,  
modeling what Brown calls  
whole-hearted living;  
Jesus is truly, authentically himself  
and we see that his courage  
in part  
is from his willingness to be vulnerable  
in the hands of God  
today, tomorrow and the third day.

Being vulnerable is not a sign of weakness;  
vulnerability actually allows us  
to open ourselves up  
to the world and all it has to offer.

So when Jesus uses an intimate, maternal image  
of hen gathering chicks under her wings,  
we glimpse a vulnerable side of the savior  
that longs to be able to hold his people  
tenderly under divine protection;  
**from all that might threaten them,  
foxes, Rome, even death.**



Jesus's determination  
to keep his face set to Jerusalem,  
to face the opposition he is likely to meet there,

---

<sup>5</sup> ibid

to face the reality of death;  
shows the courageous side  
of his willingness to be vulnerable.

He is fully aware  
that what he will face in Jerusalem  
will be hard, daunting, perhaps deadly.

He puts himself in line with the prophets of Israel  
—“Jerusalem, Jerusalem,  
the city that kills the prophets  
and stones those who are sent to it.”

The book of Jeremiah tells the story of a prophet named Uriah  
who came to give King Jehoiakim  
a word from the Lord.

When the king learns the prophet  
has a harsh word from God to deliver,  
he sets out to put Uriah to death.

Uriah tries to escape to Egypt  
but is tracked down by King Jehoiakim  
and struck down with the sword. (Jer. 26:20-23)

The Jewish Talmud  
has a legend that says  
the prophet Isaiah  
was sawn in two in Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup>

The risk is great;  
there is real reason to fear  
going to Jerusalem as a prophet  
—and yet, “to anticipate challenge and suffering  
and not look away is, by definition,  
to make oneself vulnerable  
[and Jesus does this]  
for the sake of others.”<sup>7</sup>

What could be a better display of vulnerability  
than ignoring a death threat,

---

<sup>6</sup> Leslie Hope, Luke 13:31-35 Feasting on the Word (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 2009) pg. 71

<sup>7</sup> David Lose, <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/02/lent-2-c-courage-and-vulnerability/>

and continuing to march toward doom?  
Is there anything more vulnerable and courageous  
than facing your own death?  
A death so that others might live?

“And so Jesus continues on to Jerusalem  
not to prove himself fearless  
or a hero,  
not to make a sacrifice for sin to a judgmental God,  
not even to combat death and the devil.

Rather, Jesus marches to Jerusalem  
and embraces the cross that awaits him there  
out of profound love for the people around him,  
a mother’s fierce love  
that will stop at nothing to protect her children.”<sup>8</sup>

The prophet Hosea portrays God  
as a fierce mother bear  
who will tear apart anyone  
who comes at her cubs.  
A courage that comes from vulnerability.

In thinking about courage,  
courage that stands up to adversity and keeps going,  
the baptism this morning  
is an example of vulnerability and courage.  
I don’t really get the time  
to explain all this during a baptism  
—for obvious reasons—  
babies can be cold, hungry, scared,  
or just plain uncomfortable at any given moment  
and that means one thing,  
tears.

So let me take a moment to explain  
why I think baptism, and in our case this morning,  
infant baptism  
is on up there

---

<sup>8</sup> ibid

with a courageous vulnerability.

First of all anyone in here  
who has ever loved a child  
knows the reality of not being able  
to protect that child from the world.



At some moment,  
you feel overwhelmed  
that the child you love  
is your heart walking around  
out in the world.  
In this, you allow yourself to love someone  
so much that it hurts, right?  
That is vulnerability.

I remember a good friend calling me  
before her first daughter was baptized,  
and I remember her telling me  
she wanted to leave out the renunciations  
because she had no interest  
in talking about sin  
where her infant daughter was  
concerned.  
Do you remember that part  
in the baptism liturgy we just did?

*Trusting in gracious mercy of God,  
do you turn from the ways of sin  
and renounce evil an its power in the world?*

It's hard to talk about sin and evil  
when you are holding Mallory or River or Gibson or Austin.  
It's hard to talk about evil and sin  
as you hold such adorable innocence and love.  
But what courage that as parents,



we make promises on behalf of our children  
that claim for her all the grace and mercy and love  
that Christ pours out  
because she cannot yet,  
claim it for herself!

What a blessing there is  
in the vulnerable courage  
of this community of faith  
that we make promises  
to help raise each other's children!

I love the phrase,  
*that there is no such thing  
as someone else's children.*

Because there truly isn't.  
As hen gathers her chicks under her wings  
...how I long to gather you up,  
Jerusalem.

Jesus isn't just a prophet here.  
Jesus isn't just a good teacher here.  
Jesus is whole-hearted living on display  
—love courageous in the face of fear.  
Love courageous in the face of challenge and threats.  
Love courageous under the shadow of death.

And this teaches us  
what courage and vulnerability do  
—they embolden us to keep doing  
what we have set out to do,  
today, tomorrow and even the third day.

“Christian courage, then,  
might be the kind of whole-hearted living  
that comes from believing  
that as God's children  
we are enough and that those around us  
are also God's beloved children...”<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> ibid

Whit and I walk around  
with babies in a baptism.  
And it is usually in that moment  
when parents are emotional.  
All the sudden the reality  
that this beautiful gift of God  
won't stay safe in your arms forever  
—that's when it sometimes hits you.  
This child, all these children, all of us,  
will be carried away in the rivers of life  
with the turmoil that it brings.

And yet, the courageous thing to do in that moment  
is to let ourselves cry and be thankful,  
because our vulnerability allows us  
to love each other that deeply.

This child is marked forever  
as God's own child of the covenant.  
This child is forever bound to all of us  
as we have promised to set our faces  
toward raising her  
we have set their faces  
toward loving her.

This child is forever safe  
under the protective wings of Jesus  
—even when or if she, or Jerusalem  
or any of us is unwilling.



Carl says that there are a few  
aggressive ladies in his coop.  
They'll take charge  
and try to eat more watermelon  
than the others.  
They fluff up their feathers  
and bully their friends.

That's when he steps in  
and calms things down.

He speaks softly to them,  
shooing the aggressive ones  
on to another corner of the coop.  
They all calm down and get enough to eat.  
Carl loves the First Ladies he says,  
because they don't talk back.

But I know he loves them  
because he's in charge of taking care of them.  
He's in charge of protecting them.  
He's in charge of gathering them together.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plmQt2\\_8rmY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plmQt2_8rmY) (BBC Earth, ducks) stop at  
1:47



I know they aren't chickens, but doggone they are cute.

The mother duck has kept them safe;  
but they cannot stay in the tree.  
They have no choice  
but to face the challenge head on,  
and keep going.  
They must swallow the fear,  
vulnerably take that first step,  
and find the courage to leap.  
They can't fly yet  
and their mother can't do anything  
but help encourage them to take the plunge.  
Their faith in her is total.

As we set our faces to Jerusalem,  
as we begin this journey of Lent  
we are marked by vulnerability,  
by ashes and dust.

We set aside a season in our life of faith  
to be vulnerable with God  
so that God might do what only God can do  
in and through us.

We trust that we are marked,  
not **just** by ashes and dust,  
but also by courageous waters  
that claim and uphold us.

So live with your whole heart.  
Learn from Christ's courageous vulnerability.  
Take all the shelter you need under his wings.

And listen—either for the sound of a moped a block away  
or savior who has healing in his wings.