

A friend of mine

who lives on a farm in Michigan

recently started raising chickens.

She calls them tiny dinosaurs,

which I think is so clever,

since we are told

that modern day birds

share a link to ancient dinosaurs.

According to, to Birdlife International,

“The strong evidence doesn’t just come

from fossilized bones and similarities

found across the skeleton,

but from fossilized soft tissue

– especially feathers.

Many dinosaurs had not just some kind of body covering,

but distinctive bird-like feathers.

Rare fossils also give us

glimpses of the behavior of bird-like dinosaurs,

such as *Mei long*, a small, duck-sized bipedal dinosaur

from the Cretaceous era.

It was found preserved in volcanic ash falls

– a bit like Pompeii –

captured curled up in a sleeping position

very similar to how a lot of birds

roost today.”¹

How incredible.

Birds are living link to dinosaurs.

But linking birds and dinosaurs feels

like an oxymoron because

when I think of dinosaurs,

I think giant—larger than life—lizards

and when I think of birds

¹ <https://www.birdlife.org/news/2021/12/21/its-official-birds-are-literally-dinosaurs-heres-how-we-know/>

I think of blue jays,
Carolina wrens and the robins
in my back yard.

One of my professors at seminary
had chickens too.
In the middle of Atlanta!
And then I found out that this professor,
had gotten her chickens from none other than,
Barbara Brown Taylor...
So, if you come to my office,
my most-prized picture is not,
my family's selfie at the Lincoln memorial,
or newborn pictures of my children,
but the black and white photo
of me with Barbara Brown Taylor,
holding chickens.
Holding, tiny dinosaurs.

“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 throughout the scriptures,
especially in the Psalms,
there are 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.”²

Doesn't this seem like an oxymoron?

To pair the God of the universe
with hens, chicks, and turkey vultures?

To talk about the immensity of our God
and in the same breath
mention delicate bird wings?

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)

Mother eagles apparently

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.³

Even that sounds like the character of God, doesn't it?

The Lukan passage this morning

is so nature-y;

like Nova episode.

Not only are we talking about hens and chicks

Jesus talks about foxes too.

It makes me wonder what mixture of emotions

Jesus must have been feeling—

He's headed to Jerusalem and

hears a death threat from Herod Antipas,

whom he refers to as a fox.

Even in the ancient world,

being called a fox wasn't a compliment.

² <https://juniaproject.com/biblical-maternal-images-for-god/>

³ *ibid*

*You go and tell that fox,
I'm going to keep on doing
what I'm here to do.*

You have to hand it to him,
Jesus had hutzpah.

I would think it takes some real courage
to say that—I mean *this is the* Herod
who married his half-brother's wife
and beheaded John the Baptist.

This is the Herod with an axe to grind,
the Herod who thought
he'd be king of his father's territory
but then had to split up
Herod the Great's region
with his two brothers.

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;
[clearly] God is [the one] in charge."⁴

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 more attention of late.
Here Jesus shows us a type of courage

⁴ David Schnasa Jacobsen http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3990

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
that 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.⁵
Long ago in Luke's gospel Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem
and now he declares he will continue to do
what he has always set out to do.

This is courage.

“[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.”⁶

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

By definition
being vulnerable
is being susceptible
to physical or emotional

⁵ David Lose, <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/02/lent-2-c-courage-and-vulnerability/>

⁶ *ibid*

attack or harm.
Which makes courage
seem at odds with vulnerability.

However, 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 resolution
to keep his face set to Jerusalem,
to face the opposition, he is likely to meet there,
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.⁷

Going to Jerusalem as God's prophet
involves great risk;
there is good reason to fear going
—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.”⁸

What could be a better display of vulnerability
than ignoring a death threat,
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 even to prove he is a hero,
he continues
[but] not to make a sacrifice
for sin to a judgmental God,
he goes,
not even to combat death and the devil.

Rather, Jesus marches on toward Jerusalem

⁷ Leslie Hope, Luke 13:31-35 Feasting on the Word (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 2009) pg. 71

⁸ David Lose, <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/02/lent-2-c-courage-and-vulnerability/>

and embraces the cross that awaits him there
**out of profound love for the people around him,
[like] a mother's fierce love
that will stop at nothing to protect her children.**"⁹

"How often have I desired
to gather your children together
as a hen gathers her brood under her wings..."

The prophet Hosea talks about God
as a fierce mother bear
who will tear apart anyone
who comes at her cubs.

A courage that comes from vulnerability.
A faithful oxymoron.

Courage isn't slaying dragons,
courage is living each day fully,
knowing dragons abound.

When I think of courageous vulnerability
I think of baptism;
specifically, a child or infant's baptism

Anyone who has ever loved a child
knows the reality of that child's vulnerability.
We who have lived in the world long enough
to know that like Frederic Buechner says,
"Here's the world.
Beautiful and terrible things will happen.
Do not be afraid."

You know, looking at that child that you cannot
completely insulate a child
from the reality of the world.

Children are the reality of
your heart walking around
out in the world.

In this, you allow yourself to love someone

⁹ ibid

so much that it hurts, right?
That is vulnerability.

I remember a good friend calling me
before her first daughter was baptized,
she told me
she wanted to leave out the renunciations
because she didn't want
to talk about sin
while holding
her brand-new, perfect
baby daughter.
Do you remember that part
in the baptism liturgy ?

*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 Laurel
or Vaughn or Walter.

But what courageous vulnerability
as parents and care givers,
to make faithful promises
on behalf of our children
that claim for them
all the grace and mercy and love
that Christ pours out into the world
because they cannot
claim it yet for themselves!

What a blessing there is
in the vulnerable courage
of church communities
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 child.*

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 God's heart walking around
in the world—renouncing evil
on our behalf.

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 is

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...”¹⁰

Have you seen those videos
where those adorable baby ducks
are jumping from their nest
high in the pine trees?

The mother duck has kept them safe;

¹⁰ *ibid*

but they cannot stay in the tree forever.
They have no choice
but to face the challenge head on,
and keep going.
They must swallow their innate fear,
and 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 toward Jerusalem and Herod's
as we walk around in the world,
asking for the courage
to slay the dragons, we can see and the ones we cannot,
we open ourselves up
to be vulnerable in the hands of God
so that the Lord might do what only the Lord can do
in and through us.

Let us live with our whole heart.
Courage.
Let us open ourselves to be susceptible
to the beautiful mess that is the world around us.
And in doing so, we model Christ's courageous vulnerability.
Our faithful oxymoron.
Amen.

Mark Labberton writes that
"Call is primarily about who we are
and what we do all the time.
Our call isn't measured by outcomes—
how much we achieve or accomplish—
but [call is measured] through
the process of following Jesus
in and through it all.
In the end, Call is about
continuous formation into the likeness of Jesus Christ
far more than it is about
finding direction or getting a job."¹¹

¹¹ Labberton, Mark. Called: The Crisis and Promise of Following Jesus Today, InterVarsity Press, 2014. p. 135