**First Reading Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18**

*God promises a childless and doubting Abram that he will have a child, that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars, and that the land of Canaan will be their inheritance. Abram’s trust in God is sealed with a covenant-making ceremony, a sign of God’s promise.*

1 After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” 2 But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” 3 And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.” 4 But the word of the Lord came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.” 5 He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” 6 And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness. 7 Then he said to him, “I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.” 8 But he said, “O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?” 9 He said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” 10 He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. 11 And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. 12 As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. 17 When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. 18 On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.”

**Psalm 27**

1The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? 2When evildoers close in against me to devour my flesh, they, my foes and my enemies, will stumble and fall. 3Though an army encamp against me, my heart will not fear. Though war rise up against me, my trust will not be shaken. 4One thing I ask of the Lord; one thing I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; to gaze up on the beauty of the Lord and to seek God in the temple. 5For in the day of trouble God will give me shelter, hide me in the hidden places of the sanctuary, and raise me high upon

a rock. 6Even now my head is lifted up above my enemies who surround me. Therefore I will offer sacrifice in the sanctuary, sacrifices of rejoicing; I will sing and make music to the Lord. 7Hear my voice, O Lord, when I call; have mercy on me and answer me. 8My heart speaks your message— “Seek my face.” Your face, O Lord, I will seek. 9Hide not your face from me, turn not away from your servant in anger. Cast me not away—you have been my helper; forsake me not, O God of my salvation. 10 Though my father and my mother forsake me, the Lord will take me in. 11 Teach me your way, O Lord; lead me on a level path, because of my oppressors. 12 Subject me not to the will of my foes, for they rise up against me, false witnesses breathing violence. 13 This I believe—that I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living! 14 Wait for the Lord and be strong. Take heart and wait for the Lord!

**Second Reading Philippians 3:17—4:1**

*Although Paul’s devotion to Christ has caused him to be persecuted, he does not regret the course he has taken. Writing from prison, he expresses confidence in a glorious future and encourages other Christians to follow in his footsteps.*

17 Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. 18 For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. 19 Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. 21 He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. 4:1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

**Gospel Luke 13:31-35**

*Neither Herod’s plotting nor Jerusalem’s resistance to maternal love will deter Jesus from his sacrificial mission.*

31 At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to Jesus, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” 32 He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. 33 Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a

prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ 34 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones 8 those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 35 See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’ ”

**Sermon**

 There are a number of various fables that deal with a fox and a hen. In the world of fables, it is a given that foxes will try to use their cunning to get a hen close enough to him to eat her. In some stories, the hen is tricky enough to figure out how to escape. In others, she escapes just by running…I’m thinking of Chicken Little as an example. Regardless, children’s stories have, for a long time, recognized that there is a predatory relationship between foxes and chickens. I wonder how many of us learned this fact from stories before we ever learned it through nature. If your family had a farm with chickens, I’m sure you didn’t need a story to tell you about foxes and hens.

 Apparently, we can also learn this fact from Jesus, who knows it from nature rather than stories. In today’s gospel passage, Jesus is warned about Herod’s displeasure with Jesus. Herod is the Roman governor of the Galilee region, the northern part of Israel, up around the Sea of Galilee. Pilate is the governor of the southern part of Israel, where Jerusalem is located. We’ll hear about him during Holy Week.

Most of Jesus’ ministry as recorded in Luke’s gospel occurs in the villages in the Galilee region. Jesus and his followers are travelling around teaching and healing, amassing a following, causing a stir. The last thing an oppressor like Herod wants to see is a stir among the people. If word gets to the Emperor that the people are out of control under Herod, than Herod is out. By the way, Pilate’s concern is the same when Jesus comes to Jerusalem. Jesus causes a stir wherever he goes.

So, when the Pharisees report to Jesus that Herod wants to kill him, Jesus calls Herod a fox and then in verse 34, Jesus uses hen imagery to describe himself. A fox wanting to kill the hen, see how that works? Another interesting point to note is that it is the Pharisees who are warning Jesus. Let this be a reminder that Pharisees are not all bad in the gospels. This is a genuine warning for Jesus’ benefit, not a trick. But Jesus blows off their warning, and he

asserts that he is not going to allow Herod’s threats to deter him from the life-giving work he is already doing…casting out demons and curing illness. He WILL accomplish this work on HIS timetable because he knows that the stirring that Herod fears is exactly what the people need.

The stirring that the people need is the touch of the kingdom of heaven on their difficult, burdened lives. And Jesus WILL NOT STOP until those who suffer are stirred by the presence, by the mercy of their God. Jesus fills them with hope and strength to face this day and the next and the one after that differently than they had before. Jesus reveals that Herod is not the only force, the only presence that has an impact on their lives. Through Jesus, God touches, heals, inspires the lives of all people.

As Jesus prepares to finish his ministry in the Galilee region, he also prepares to head to Jerusalem. If we had a theme for this season of Lent, it would be Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem. During these weeks, we meditate on this journey, what Jesus will face, the great courage and love that enabled him to go despite the conflict and suffering he would be facing once he got there. Today we overhear the angst, the lament that Jesus expresses over Jerusalem. But it is important to understand what he is actually lamenting.

Jerusalem was the location of the Temple, the place that was designated as the holy space where God dwelled among God’s people. We’ve talked before about how, on the holy days of the Jewish calendar, the people would travel to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices and worship God. Jerusalem, the Temple…these were holy places touched by the presence of God in the minds of the people. At the same time, however, Jerusalem was also the political center for that particular region as well. The political authority at that time was Rome and it was Pilate who exercised that authority in Jerusalem. It was a brutal authority, one that used violence to “keep the peace” and held down the many to build the wealth of the few. Unfortunately, as has too often been the case throughout history, the ways of the political system influenced many leaders of the faith to the point that many of them concerned themselves with power and wealth more so than with the spiritual life of the people. Soon, they too were exploiting people for money and excluding people from God’s mercy.

When Jesus laments over Jerusalem, he laments about much…about a history of God’s word being ignored by human leadership, about the fact that now the current religious leadership lost sight of their calling, about the way in which the Roman empire was oppressing

and burdening the people, making their lives difficult, about the fact that the people did not know that God was with them because the people assigned to do so were preoccupied with earthly power and wealth.

As Jesus laments, he speaks of being like a mother hen who wants to gather her chicks under her wing to protect them, to save them from harm. Jesus’ desire is to give humanity a safe haven, to give humanity a space that we know is for safety, not exploitation, for rest and comfort, not oppression, where God resides with us with the sole purpose of providing us with that which the foxes of the world, whoever or whatever they are, want to take away…safety, dignity, peace.

These are not just assurances for the life to come…this is what Christ assures humanity through his death and resurrection. Christ does open his arms wide on the cross so we can gather in the safety and security of God’s presence any time. The cross of Christ stirs up a new reality for our lives…a reality in which God relates to us by giving us what we need, not taking something away. Jesus ministry and his death on the cross stir our world to provide moments and places and experiences that sustain us and others especially when life is hard, when we or others are experiencing suffering.

This is the work that we as the church are called to carry on today. We are loved and protected chicks, but we are also stirrers for those who are weighed down, who feel buried and weighed down. God, through Christ, stirs through us and around us a safe haven, to give the suffering a space that is for safety, not exploitation…a place that is for rest and comfort, not oppression, where God resides with us with the sole purpose of providing us safety, dignity, peace. Amen