

2 Lent March 13, 2022
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The Chicken Who Believed In Freedom
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Ginger is – in my opinion - the most loving hen in modern entertainment, literature, and folklore. Because even though she was a chicken, Ginger believed in freedom. She lives only in the 2000 groundbreaking stop animation movie *Chicken Run*, but her character is still one of the most inspiring. Ginger lived on a chicken farm and believed in liberation; freedom from the tyranny of morning roll call, egg collection, eating, and dying, all at the hand of the chicken farmer. She believed there was a better life beyond the fences of the farm and endeavored to escape and bring all the chickens with her. Her escape attempts are the source of humorous entertainment for viewers of the movie, and a nice distraction for the other chicken characters, who it turns out didn't really want to escape. Because they couldn't imagine any life other than the one they experienced behind the fences of the chicken farm: where the farmer was their ruler. And while it was not a good life, it was the life they knew.

But Ginger didn't let this stop her from trying to escape and bring all the chickens with her. Because she loved them and wanted the same for them as she wanted for herself. This characteristic of Ginger is what Jesus meant when he referred to himself as a hen longing to gather her brood under her wings and was rejected in today's Gospel.

The language of receiving the love of God as finding shelter under God's wings can be found throughout the Bible, especially in the psalms. Perhaps that phrase is often interpreted as nurture that is only comforting, warming, and calming. But throughout scripture God often called God's people away from behaviors that are harmful to themselves and to others. The prophets are often the messengers who call people to free themselves from a life of being fenced in by the belief that power expressed in violence, greed, status, privilege, or oppression will give them peace and security. Finding security or refuge under the shadow of God's wings was language that implied rejecting the love of power and the sinful behavior such power justifies to resting in God's powerful love that shows compassion, patience, healing, and reconciliation. If you are familiar with the books of the prophets in the Bible, you are probably also familiar with how most of the time people did not do what the prophets asked. For the same reason the chickens didn't want to escape from the chicken farm; they couldn't imagine a life different from the one they knew. They couldn't imagine the liberating love of God.

This is the rejection that gave Jesus cause to lament in today's Gospel. It is a rejection not only of God's sovereignty, but also God's love and nurture. Even in our modern time, the power of God's love is often rejected for the love of power, and the author of Luke's Gospel shows us this rejection breaks Jesus' heart. Yet, like Ginger the hen in *Chicken Run*, Jesus didn't give up his liberating work, even when advised to do so by some pharisees.

Scholars are not sure if the pharisees who showed up in today's Gospel reading with an urgent warning for Jesus were well intentioned or not. They remind us to be cautious about judging all people based on the behavior of some, or even the majority. There were pharisees who liked Jesus and listened to him. There was diversity of opinion in their ranks, just like there are people with different observations, perspectives, and opinions in all groups today. But it doesn't seem to matter to Jesus if the pharisees' warning was meant to be helpful or a diabolical political plot. He was clear he had no intention of stopping what he was doing. Not even Herod, who he called a fox, the political leader of the region, the same Herod who had killed John the Baptist, could stop him.

Hearing Jesus call Herod a fox might conjure up images of the animal some of us might be familiar with and may have seen in the wild. Some of those images might be positive or innocent. Several friends have sent me pictures of foxes with their babies whose dens were near their houses. They were cute and did not cause any harm. Or foxes might bring back fond memories from animated movies featuring fox characters like Disney's *Robin Hood* or more recently *Zootopia* where we see foxes use their skill of cleverness to do good for others. But in Jesus' time, calling someone a fox wasn't necessarily a direct correlation to the animal. Fox was a term used in rabbinical literature to designate contempt. In the Biblical book Song of Solomon, fox was a term used for those who destroyed a vineyard. In Jesus' day and most likely for the author of Luke's Gospel, the word fox was a way of referring to a person who was corrupt and destructive, a lover of power who did not care about the consequences of their actions.

In today's Gospel it seems such a person, a fox, cannot stop a hen from yearning to free his brood from the oppression of fear, violence, and financial abuse the political and military power of Rome was known for. We know Jesus was no political or military leader, Jesus wasn't going to achieve the freedom from sin and death for all people through the same love of power, no more than Ginger the chicken planned to lead a violent military style coup against the farmer. No, Jesus, like Ginger, was up to something very different.

Jesus was showing the world the power of God's love. Love that heals, shows compassion by suffering with people instead of ignoring their reality. I learned how we as a parish are embodying this love of God on Ash Wednesday while doing Ashes to Go. For the first time ever, while offering ashes on Ash Wednesday, the passersby did not stop to question what I was doing. Instead, quite a few people showed up and simply received the ashes and words of imposition with tears in their eyes, or gratitude. Only one person had a question, and it wasn't about Ash Wednesday or the church, it was simply what they had to do to receive what I was offering.

This made me realize our neighbors were giving something I am not sure they have given us in the past. Something extremely valuable. Trust. Our neighbors did not look at me with suspicion, as they have with the preachers or ministers who visit campus spreading a message of who God hates or why they should convert to Christianity. Instead, they stopped to receive God's love and the reminder of our shared mortality. They stopped to write down the things they want forgiven, and filled up our reflective sign with their words, trusting we weren't going to use their responses for our benefit. I hope they found some healing by naming those things. Several people thanked me for having free face masks available for them throughout the pandemic. Others thanked me just for being here, thanked me for the church being here.

It was beautiful. And powerful. Because there really wasn't a "them" and "us". There is only us, together, being real neighbors, giving and receiving each other's confessions and love and forgiveness. I can't help but wonder if this change has something to do with our intentional efforts to be present *with* our neighbors during this pandemic by being in solidarity with them. Being consistent by offering masks and wearing them, as a sign of our love for each other. By putting up a memorial to help us name and grieve the loss of lives to the covid-19 virus. These are just two ways we have shown our neighbors we are suffering with them, not ignoring reality by pretending the pandemic isn't happening or is over before it really is. We are being brave enough to walk with them all the way through it. That courage is the love of God here on earth, the very beautiful stuff of Jesus Christ. The work he said the destructive love of power will never stop, not even when it takes him to the cross.

In the movie *Chicken Run*, Ginger was finally able to convince her fellow chickens to work together to escape from the farm when they learned the farmer had plans to convert his chicken farm into a chicken pot pie factory. A plan he believed would make him more money even though it would be much harder on the chickens and revealed what he truly loved. The chickens made it, they found freedom and paradise in a bird sanctuary where they took shelter under each

other's wings, and the ultimately under the wings of a love more powerful than greed or violence or fear. The wings of the ultimate mother hen who loves not only chickens, but each and every one of us. And calls us to take refuge in all times and places and circumstances under the shadow of those all-encompassing wings of God's love.