

The Second Sunday in Lent
March 13, 2022; Year C
The Episcopal Church of the Atonement
The Rev. Nancy Webb Stroud

Genesis 15:1-12,17-18; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 13:31-35; Psalm 27

Which would you rather be, a fox or a chicken? Jesus said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow . . .'"

My dad was a foxhunter. He loved horses, and he loved hounds, and he loved sport. I think he actually loved the foxes that they hunted, too. He wanted to chase a clever fox that would give him a good day's exercise. That is how foxes live in the popular imagination, right? Foxes are clever. They hunt at night, and they get away with things. Sometimes, they even get away with the chicks that live in the hen house. I guess I blame it on my dad that I grew up thinking that a fox was fun and clever and a chicken was, umm, good with gravy.

Last week our Gospel story was of Jesus being driven into the wilderness, where the Devil tempted him with visions of bodily comfort and worldly glory and power. Jesus was tempted by the world, the flesh, and the devil. And his choice was to turn aside from those temptations and remember that he and all humanity has been created by the God of love.

And two millennia after the temptation of Jesus, we pray, *lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*. That is a line from *The Lord's Prayer*. We will pray it today. Many of us have prayed it already today, or we did last night before we fell asleep. If you have children, you might have prayed it three or four times last night as you put each one to bed. That prayer that Jesus taught us is prayed all the time. And one of the features of it is an acknowledgment that evil exists, and that we need God's help so that we don't get caught up in it. *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*.

In 1969, the International Consultation on English Texts, was founded to study whether churches like The Episcopal Church and the Lutheran Churches and the Roman Catholic Church in English-speaking countries could agree on the wording of prayers and creeds that we hold in common. Well, that was half a century ago, and most of us still don't agree on too much, but some of the handiwork of the ICET can be found in our *Book of Common Prayer*. Go ahead and pick one up! Turn to page 364, for instance—or just look on page 11 of your service leaflet.

If you have ever wondered why we print two versions of the Lord's Prayer every week, this is why: the translation on the right is one that we pray in common with many other English-speaking followers of Jesus throughout the world. And even though it is less familiar to most of us—the translation carries a more accurate meaning—at least according to scholars of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, the languages that Jesus spoke. I find the whole conversation fascinating, but even if you don't, take a look at the fourth clause of our most familiar prayer.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
**And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.**
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
**Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.**
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. Our tongues trip over it, of course. It is not the way we were taught as children. It's not the way I taught my own children or the way I pray this prayer with the children of this church--**but** it is a very good translation of the Greek of the New Testament. Jesus knew about times of trial. Jesus wasn't talking to us about the temptation of driving 40 miles per hour in a 30 mile per hour zone or eating a piece of chocolate after you have brushed your teeth. Jesus was talking about those times when our response to where we are and what we are doing is going to be a choice between our self-interest and our concern for the good of others, that is, a choice between evil and good. And he taught us that God is our salvation in those times when our faith is tested. God is our salvation in those times when our courage is tested. God is our salvation in those times when evil is close at hand.

God brought Abram 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." And Abram believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Those verses from today's first lesson are from very early in the Bible, just fifteen chapters into the first book of the Hebrew scriptures. God had been talking to Abram for awhile. And in the previous chapters, God has been doing all sorts of things with people – creating us, for one. And saving Noah from a flood, for another. So the people know that God exists. But now, Abram *believes* the Lord. That is, Abram trusts God. Abram and God know one another. They have a relationship. And the Lord gives that relationship of trust a name – it is *righteousness*. Abram is in a right relationship with the Lord. A lot more will happen – Abram will get a new name, Abraham. And eventually, in God's good time, Abraham will have sons, Ishmael and Isaac, and from them, God's promise will come real: *count the stars . . . so shall your descendants be.*

Just fifteen chapters into the story of God and God's people we learn that God desires a relationship with us that is much more than just our acknowledgment that God created us. God desires righteousness for us, a relationship of trust. God desires a relationship with us, and more, God has a vision of us living in right relationships with one another. God's dream for God's people is that we shine like the stars and live together in relationships of love and care. Doesn't that sound like a dream that we want to bring true?

In our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus is in the thick of human relationships. Herod is a minor king, a civil ruler with the power to collect taxes and live the good life. And Jesus knows just about how far he can trust Herod. He can trust him to act in his own self-interest. It is the exact opposite of righteousness. Herod is self-righteous, a sly fox, cleverly

able to get what will be best for him. “Go tell that fox for me that I am casting out demons and delivering healing and he won’t get to kill me today.”

Jesus has Herod’s number, but Jesus knows the people, too. He lumps them together by the name of the city: *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones 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!*

In this short little lesson, Jesus is warned to avoid evil – to get away from Herod, who is bound to kill him. And of course, he does not run away. And he doesn’t consider his own safety. Instead, he prays for the people. It’s a touching scene: Jesus yearning over the people as a hen broods over chickens. And I think of those days when I stood over my children’s cribs and prayed with them: *lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

Jesus prays over Jerusalem, like a mother putting her children to bed or like a hen gathering her chicks under her wing.

And there it is: Herod, the fox and Jesus, the hen. We all know what happens when the fox gets into the hen house, don’t we? And this is who Jesus is: the hen. Jesus is like the hen, who gives life to a whole brood, who yearns over them with love and lays out her life to protect her chicks.

You know, Jesus is God, who created all things that are. And if Jesus wanted to be a sly fox, he certainly could be. Or a lion. Or an eagle. But on this day, Jesus, who is the righteousness of God, gives himself a much more humble image. He is the hen who broods over us; the mother who prays over us.

And Jesus invites each one of us to pray, too. We can be the hens in this little story, if we look on one another in love. We can look on each one of the neighbors whom God has given us. We can look at those on our right and on our left, and because God gives us eyes in our imaginative hearts, we can look on those outside these doors – the children in our schools, the strangers walking on the sidewalks, liberal and conservative, vaccinated and unvaccinated, Russian and Ukrainian—whatever dichotomy you can think of, God gives us the love to brood over each one.

We can do that, but then we can’t be the fox. We won’t get our own way, or feed our personal interest. Because God gives us the eyes to see, we can look on every other one and pray, *save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.* And then the world will be changed from the nightmare it so often is to the vision that God has for us.