

One thing I've always wondered about doing, but never got round to is to keep chickens. Maybe one of the reasons I haven't is because of the stories I've heard about Foxes, and how they attack the chickens, not for food, but simply because they must, being foxes. It's not always the case though - **Chickens in a school farm in north-western France are believed to have grouped and killed a juvenile fox.** The unusual incident in Brittany took place after the fox entered the coop with 3,000 hens through an automatic hatch door which closed immediately.

"There was a herd instinct and they attacked him with their beaks," said Pascal Daniel, head of farming at the agricultural school Gros-Chêne.

The body of the small fox was found the following day in a corner of the coop.

"It had blows to its neck, blows from beaks," Mr Daniel told AFP news agency.

The farm is home to up to 6,000 free-range chickens who are kept in a five-acre site. The coop is kept open during day and most of the hens spend the daytime outside, AFP adds.

In our gospel reading there's mention of Foxes and chickens...

What description of Jesus do you most relate to – Jesus talks about himself as the good shepherd, the living water, the way, truth and life. But here he likens himself to a mother hen! First, and I'll return to it later, are the chickens. I don't know whether you've seen the videos – there's a great one of a hen collecting all her chicks up, sheltering all her fledgling chicks under her wings in a rainstorm. She's willing to do anything for them, even sacrifice her own safety and security. It's a vivid picture from our Gospel reading of what Jesus is willing to do for his people. This image of hens and chicks is an emotionally charged description of what Jesus thinks his death will be all about. But before we think about that further, let's go back to the first part of our reading. If chicks are in mind in vv34-35, then the first (31-33) is the predatory Fox - Herod.

For most of the gospel, Herod has cast a dark shadow over events., but not until now posed a direct threat to Jesus. The first sees some not unsympathetic Pharisees who warn Jesus about "Herod," which would have been Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee (technically a "tetrarch," or ruler of a fourth of the former kingdom of Herod the Great), 4 B.C.--A.D. 39. Why this Herod would have sought to kill Jesus is not said. The most plausible reason would be that he thought of Jesus as, in some way, a successor to John the Baptist; some had even claimed that "John had been raised from the dead" (9:7), and that Jesus was he.

In any case, Jesus was an enigma and a threat, and in 9:9 Herod declares concerning John and Jesus: "John I beheaded; but who is this about whom I hear such things?" To which Luke adds, "And he tried to see him."

The response of Jesus to the Pharisees in our story (13:32-33) appears dismissive, but it is also a challenge to Herod. Calling him a "fox," Jesus implies that Herod is out to destroy, just as a fox would when attacking chicks.

Jesus says that he must continue the course of his ministry day by day. He is on a course that cannot be interrupted, for he had "set his face to go to Jerusalem" (9:51). That includes a ministry of exorcisms, healings, and ultimately (by implication) his suffering, death, and resurrection. The latter is alluded to in the statement "on the third day I finish my work" (9:32). No reader of Luke would miss the implication – it

was the boy Jesus who was found in the temple on the third day, the risen lord Jesus, alive again on the third day.

Jesus destiny is clear – to go to Jerusalem and die, risking the threats of the fox, and looking at the second image, adopting the role of the mother hen to the chicks faced with sudden danger. How will Jerusalem respond?

The lament is tinged with great sadness. Jerusalem had already been the place where prophets had been killed (Jeremiah 26:20-23; cf. Matthew 23:29-30; Acts 7:52) and where early Christian witnesses, including Stephen and James, would be martyred (Acts 7:59; 12:2). Jesus cries out, using feminine imagery of a hen with her chicks, saying that he would gladly have protected the city, but the people in the end would not listen.

So we catch a glimpse of what Jesus' purpose in travelling to Jerusalem will be. Israel's and greatest tragedy is about to unfold – and they need to turn back to God again – to repent, to accept the promised King whose kingdom is one of love and peace. This still remains the only way to avoid the disaster which comes about by rejecting Jesus.

What might this mean for us today?

Jesus knew his purpose was to go to Jerusalem, even though the Pharisees warned him. How easily do we get distracted from serving God – instead of following his good and perfect plan for our lives, challenging though that sometimes might be?

Second, what part does lament have in our lives? Tragedies like that in New Zealand over the last few days may cause us to think, even to comment – but do we lament – to pour out our hearts to God for the mess that the world is in – to call upon God?

And finally, how do we respond to this very feminine biblical image of God being like the mother hen who longs to shelter and protect? Will we let Jesus be that for us?

A prayer of reflection:-

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! [Luke 13:34](#)

Dear Jesus, of all the pictures you painted and metaphors you used, to help us understand your love for us... I have to admit... **mother hen** never made its way into my top five. It just doesn't seem to carry the same weight or make the same impression as all of your “**I Am**” claims. Yet as I ponder this image, it is **profoundly endearing**... and more than **appropriate**.

That you chose such a metaphor says much about the **depths of your affection** and the **intensity of your engagement** in our lives. It also reveals how **fragile, vulnerable** and **foolish** we are as your “chicks.” It makes me want to know and worship you all the more. It makes me want to run to you this morning with full abandon and primed anticipation.

Jesus, I certainly praise you for your ongoing commitment to gather your family **from every nation**, but I'm especially thankful today for your commitment to **gather me**... because I'm “prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.” Keep running after me. Keep running **after ME**, Jesus... when I **drift**

naively and when I **roam wantonly** to places I have no business exploring. Protect me from various foxes and wolves that would have me for a snack. Don't let me **ever forget** that spiritual warfare will continue, and **intensify**, until the Day you return.

Jesus, I also praise you that, like a mother hen, you gather us and place us **under your wings... next to your heart**. You're such a compassionate, kind, tender Saviour. How foolish I am to think otherwise... how foolish I am to think there's any better place to be than under your "wings" in the **safe haven** of the gospel... in the **refuge** of your care... in **vital communion** with you.

Though a nursing mother may even forget her suckling child, you will **never** forget or forsake one of your "chicks." Because the gospel is true and powerful, **I am willing** to be gathered every moment of this new day. Amen.