

## Lent 2 Sermon: Revd Debbie Dewes from St Luke's Brislington.

21<sup>st</sup> February 2016, Ref: Luke 13:31-35

Lovely to be here – thank you so much for your invitation and welcome.

Greetings from the church where I serve St Luke's in Brislington. If you know the A4, you will know Brislington as the place of TKMaxx, Lidl, the Murco garage and traffic jams. In fact, our rather lovely medieval church is positioned conveniently behind Miss Millie's, so directions are easy.

We are a congregation of up to 130 of whom about 60-70 come regularly every week. We struggle with our ancient roof needing fixing, and our sound system beginning to give up the ghost, but also rejoice in sharing the good news of God, for example by having a visiting programme to visit every house in the parish over the next three years. We visited 1200 last year, and told them we would be praying for their road next week and was there anything they'd like us to pray for. We had a variety of responses!

We support with money, with practical gifts, and with personnel, a project in the St Paul's region of Bristol which gives out food parcels week by week. And so on.

It is a vibrant and loving community, where God is loved, worshipped and served by his people, and I am grateful to be one of them.

As we come to God's word together, let us pray...

During a busy morning on the cheese counter at Harrods some years ago, a newcomer had been left to deal with telephone enquiries. Suddenly there was a call that caused the colour to drain from the young man's face. 'Would you please hold the line and I'll fetch the buyer', he whispered// The buyer excused herself from a queue of customers and returned briskly to her office. A few minutes later she reappeared. 'You did the right thing', she reassured the newcomer, 'but so that you know in future, The Prince of Wales is a pub on the other side of the Brompton Road.'

Mistaken identity://

Our gospel passage today is quite disparate, containing many different threads and elements – too much to unpick all of them in one sermon, unless you'd like to stay till a week next Tuesday! So I'd like to unpick just three of the threads, //:the Fox, the chickens and the hen://

### 1) The Fox

Our passage begins with the Pharisees warning Jesus to get away - 'for Herod wants to kill you'. And Jesus responds knowingly – 'tell that fox...' Two things to notice,

- first of all he knows that the Pharisees are informing, on him, knows that they have been sent by Herod to try to get him out of the way.
- Second, and rather startlingly for some of us, he calls Herod 'a fox'.

A fox is a term of contempt, and it is the only time in the gospels where Jesus is recorded as being anything like contemptuous. And when he meets Herod, a meeting recorded in Luke 23, Jesus says nothing to him. Herod wants to see a sign, a wonder, a healing, and Jesus simply says nothing.

Here we find Herod the fox becoming the fox the tempter.

You may have looked at Jesus temptations in the wilderness last week - here is another temptation. Jesus is encouraged to flee by the Pharisees because Herod wants to kill him. All

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through Jesus ministry he meets people who 'tempt' him not to fulfil his journey to the cross. Here it is the Pharisees suggesting he run away.

The temptation here is one of cross avoidance. Run away, you don't have to do this, you don't have to die. It must have been a real temptation.

Jesus's response to them reveals that he is aware of this temptation, since he talks about the importance of Jerusalem and says that he can die nowhere but there.

Here, as in Gethsemane, Jesus is tempted to take the easy way out and to step off the path that will bring about his certain death.

What is your fox this Lent? What is tempting you to step off the path? Is it your picture of who Jesus is? Have you mistaken his identity? Because we can often be as mistaken as the man in Harrods!

Do we think Jesus is someone who lives at church who we go to visit once a week, or once a month, and that's all that is required?

Or someone we can keep as an insurance policy in the filing cabinet, there for a rainy day.

Don't mistake Jesus' identity this Lent.

Don't be caught by the cunning, sly, foxy temptations to come off the path.

The weasly – it will be OK you'll never get caught, the wily coyote – it doesn't count if nobody knows.

What is your fox?

What do we need to be treating with contempt?

What in us do we need not to speak to?

Where can we rob the tempting fox of its power by simply ignoring it? Don't mistake Jesus' identity, remember who he is.

So the fox.

Let's turn our attention now to the chickens.

### 2) The chickens

That's us. We are the chickens in this passage.

'How often I have longed to gather Jerusalem's children together as a hen gathers her brood'. Says Jesus. That's us now, God's brood, Jerusalem's children.

What are chickens like?

They are fluffy, they are stupid, they are easily led.

And one of the ways we simply mistake Jesus' identity as chickens is to mis-remember who he is and what he has done, and so to focus on the wrong things. I'm trying desperately to avoid the phrase running about like headless chickens - but that is what we do, we run about looking for salvation in the wrong direction, from the wrong person, we mistake Jesus' identity as the one who saves, who redeems, who give us all of life richly to enjoy.

Let me see if I can make that clearer by telling you a story.

A man died and went to heaven. Of course, St. Peter met him at the Pearly Gates. St. Peter said, "Here's how it works. You need 100 points to make it into heaven. You tell me all the

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good things you've done, and I give you a certain number of points for each item, depending on how good it was. When you reach 100 points, you get in." "Okay," the man said. "I was married to the same woman for 50 years and never cheated on her, even in my heart." "That's wonderful," said St. Peter. "That's worth three points!" "Three points?" said the man. "Well, I attended church all my life and supported its ministry by giving generously with my time and money." "Terrific!" said St. Peter. "That's certainly worth a point." "One point?!! Well, I started a soup kitchen in my city and worked in a shelter for the homeless." "Fantastic, that's good for two more points," said Peter. "Two points!" the man cried. "At this rate the only way I'll get into heaven is by the grace of God." "Bingo" said Peter, "100 points! Come on in."

As chickens we run about thinking we need to save ourselves. As chickens we mistake who Jesus is, and so we forget that he has done the work of the cross, defeating the powers of sin and evil, and we think he might need our help.

Mistaken identity. Remember who Jesus is.

We don't need to do the work of salvation, he's done it. We don't need to work for our salvation, we have it as a free gift of grace. It is hard to imagine a God that generous, but don't forget who Jesus is, don't mistake his identity 'I came that you might have life', says Jesus, 'and have it in abundance'.

And if we think that Jesus is going to come to make our lives pink and fluffy, make everything nice, then that is to mistake Jesus' identity. Jesus comes to make life fulfilling, not nice; to make life worthwhile, not pink and fluffy; to make life more truthful, to make our lives those lived with God - as his disciples, which is nothing to do with polite, nice, pink or fluffy, and has everything to do with faithful, true, right, the cross, and the resurrection.

The fox, the chickens and finally the hen.

### 3) The hen

As we come to think about the hen I am indebted to Tom Wright for this idea. He suggests that behind this picture of the hen and gathering the brood under its wings, though not mentioned, is the image of fire.

Fire, he says, is as terrifying to trapped animals as to people, if not more so. When a farmyard catches fire, the animals try to escape; but, if they cannot, some species have developed ways of protecting their young. The picture here is of a hen, gathering her chicks under her wings to protect them. There are stories of exactly this: after a farmyard fire, those cleaning up have found a dead hen, scorched and blackened – with live chicks sheltering under her wings. She has quite literally given her life to save them. It is a vivid and violent image of what Jesus declared he longed to do for Jerusalem, and by implication for all Israel. But at the moment, all he could see was chicks scurrying off in the opposite direction, taking no notice of the smoke and flames indicating the approach of danger, nor the urgent warnings of the one who alone could give them safety.

This picture of the hen and the chickens shows us very clearly that Jesus is in no doubt about what is going to happen to him, and what his death is all about. Others may have mistaken his identity and think he is simply riding on a wave of popularity, that he is a good teacher, that he had some good ideas – you will know what people think Jesus is – but he knows who he is, he knows what he has come to do. He may not know all the details, but he knows that his life will be required, that he will lay down his life like the mother hen so that the chickens can be saved.

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Mistaken identity. Remember who Jesus is.

For all of us, the power of apathy, subtlety, or simple forgetfulness of our faith and our priorities, make us tempted to mistake Jesus' identity, to forget who he is.

He is the one who saves, the one who redeems, the one who loves, and the one who comes to us, wherever we are, whatever we feel like, and comes to us not to put us in our place, not to chastise us, condemn us or tell us off, but comes to us to love us and to love us and to love us – ready to gather us under his wings as he lays down his life for us.

The fox of temptation, the headless chickens running about looking the wrong way, the hen who gather her chicks to save them.

No mistaken identity then. Who is Jesus in this passage? He is the one:

who resists the temptation to avoid the cross,

who longs to gather the chickens to a life not of nice-ness but of truth,

who is ready to die

So let's recap and remember what this means for us

Find the fox of temptation in your life and resist it.

As chickens let us be sure who Jesus is and not make him in our image this Lent. Read the scriptures, learn to pray in different ways, in different places, allow God access to your life as you learn of him and his ways, so that you know who Jesus is in truth, in love, in grace.

And follow the hen. Maybe an unexpected slogan, but by now you know what I mean! Follow the hen who laid down his life. Grow in love and faithfulness to him, grow in generosity and kindness to one another, grow more like Jesus, the prayer of my heart, your heart and all our hearts. 'Lord, make me more like Jesus'.

Let us not mistake who Jesus is, and as we catch even the merest glimpse of him and his life in the world, we will find ourselves responding to the real Jesus who comes and lays down his life for us – painfully, willingly, and graciously. Responding to him with love and wonder and praise.

As we come to communion this morning, let us be those who can receive the bread and the wine, the symbols of our salvation, sure that we come to the one

who IS love,

who gives love

and who we long to know in all his glory, avoiding the fox, ready to follow the hen.