

March 13, Lent 2C (Luke 13:31-35)

Is the fox cunning and clever, or is it wily and untrustworthy?

by [Jennifer Moland-Kovash](#) in the [February 23, 2022](#) issue

I don't remember when exactly I decided that I wanted chickens. I suppose there's always been part of me—part hippie, part farm girl wannabe, full-time reader of *Mother Earth News*—that has romanticized the notion of raising poultry to the point where it seems like a feasible option in my life. In my mind I've made it out to be not much different than, say, having a dog, and in some ways probably easier. In this phase of my life, I acknowledge that I (probably) won't become a suburban chicken farmer. But knowing that doesn't stop me from cooing over them longingly whenever I encounter them in the spring at certain supply stores. It doesn't stop me from reading books and websites about them, keeping an Amazon wish list of chicken coops, and learning which varieties produce different-colored eggs.

Nor does it stop me from looking rather squinty-eyed at foxes. We don't see many foxes in my suburban landscape, though I hear stories of people who hear coyotes and see the occasional print too close to their yard for comfort. Sometimes we catch a glimpse of foxes along the road while driving, their red fur standing starkly against the white snow. Not long ago I observed one in Minnesota, trotting alongside a not-quite-frozen stream. He was a handsome fellow. But there was something about the way he stood when he paused, surveying, that made me not trust him.

Or was I just reading into it because of the way the fox is portrayed? Is the fox cunning and clever, or is it wily and untrustworthy? The answer is probably both. The fox that gets into the henhouse or the barnyard or the city square kills without care, leaving behind nothing but feathers drifting to the ground. Chickens are defenseless against such an aggressor, but still a mother hen will do her best to protect the little ones.

When the Pharisees tell Jesus that Herod is after him, Jesus tells them to send that fox a message: keep your distance, I'm busy doing the work of healing and casting

out demons. He laments over the people of Jerusalem, saying that he wishes to gather them together, to protect them as a mother hen protects her brood.

While we generally think of Jerusalem as a holy city, it was also a place where the prophets—people like John the Baptist—spoke against the government and didn't always survive. Jesus weeps, wishing that the people would have listened to his truth—a truth that promised life, drove out fear, and gave peace and mercy. While most of us don't live in Jerusalem, we too are the chicks that Jesus gathers like a mother hen, to protect from the foxes that lurk just outside the chicken coop or the yard.

Truthfully, I'm a bit uncomfortable with identifying with the chickens here. I don't feel like my life is in danger on a regular basis, and for that I'm grateful. I don't feel like there's a fox trotting around the perimeter of my life, eyeing me up for dinner, waiting to catch me unaware. For many people there is a reality to that feeling that I can't comprehend. But the truth is that there are lots of things that keep us from living fully, and most of them boil down to fear. And fear is very foxy indeed.

The fox that tells us we aren't good enough—that's fear. The fox that says your barnyard is changing and maybe you won't fit in anymore—that's fear. The fox that tells you that you don't have enough—that's fear. The fox that tells me that if I don't make the right choices for my child's preschool or elementary school or high school, he won't get into the best college and get the best job and be somebody someday—that's fear.

Fear is so very foxy, especially for chickens like us. As it stands there, pretty against the snow, powerful and destructive, we can feel our feathers quiver a bit. Fear doesn't have to ransack the coop to bring havoc to our lives.

So what do we do? We look to Jesus' example. He doesn't hide, even though he knows he will die. Go and tell that fox that I'm busy—bringing good news to those who need it, being the hands and feet of God in this world. Go and tell that fox that I've got better things to do in this world than huddle in the corner waiting to die. Go and tell that fox that we're busy living, but when the time comes, we'll be under the wings of Jesus. Come along, chickens. We've got some living to do.