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When my children were young, I loved to tell them stories. Whether reading from a book or telling one from my imagination, stories filled our evening bedtime routine. When they were very young, picture books often comprised our storytelling diet, filled with pictures and simple words that they could help read.

When my daughter received a stuffed blue bunny as a gift, the stories I created had Blue Bunny and my daughter traveling to the moon in a spaceship made from a giant cardboard box. When my son was a bit older, I read classics, such as C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, with the famous *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. We also explored contemporary literature, such as the Harry Potter series. Many of the stories contained heroes and villains, struggles against good and evil.

Good and bad seem to fill many stories, especially in Aesop's Fables, which often tried to teach a lesson. Many stories contained a fox, portrayed as sly and as one who misbehaved, as in the Fox and the Crow. In this story, a crow sits in a

tree with a piece of cheese. The fox desires the cheese and begins to flatter the crow, suggesting that its voice must sound so sweet. When the crow begins to caw to show off its voice, the cheese falls to the ground, which the fox immediately devours.

The fox has also been portrayed as not too clever, as when the fox wanted a bunch of grapes hanging from a vine in a tree. The fox jumped to get them, but since unable to reach them, the fox walked away saying, "Those grapes were probably too sour anyway."

Since many of these tales existed many centuries before Jesus lived, he may have known about the reputation of the sly fox, a character that shows up in Luke's Gospel. Jesus was also a great storyteller, and right before he used the imagery of a fox, he invited his listeners to imagine what God's place might look like:

- a mustard seed, though very small, grows and becomes a tall tree, where even birds build their nests. The story suggests that what God does or what we do may seem small, but through God, it can grow into something amazing.

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- Jesus said that God’s place is also like the tiny ingredient of yeast, but when added to flour, causes it to rise into a large loaf of bread.
- God’s place is like a narrow door that many may try to enter, but where those often last will be first and those who try to get in first will be last.

As Jesus was telling these stories on the way to Jerusalem, some religious leaders warned him, “You need to get away from here, for King Herod wants to kill you.”

Herod didn’t have the best reputation, often portrayed as insensitive to the Jewish members of his community. For example, he erected a golden eagle at the entrance of the Temple and purchased expensive gifts from the taxes he collected. The historian Josephus, who lived about the same time, emphasized Herod’s tyrannical authority.¹

In light of Herod’s reputation, Jesus replied to the warning about Herod, “Tell that fox that I’ve no time for him right now. Today and tomorrow I’m

busy clearing out the demons and healing the sick; the third day I’m wrapping things up.”²

Jesus used the imagery of Herod as a fox, but rather than suggesting the king was sly or clever, Jesus sent a message that the king’s leadership is opposed to what Jesus was doing in the world. While Herod was spreading fear, Jesus was planting mustard seeds of hope and healing, painting a picture of what his kingdom would look like, a place that would grow like yeast where evil would be cleaned out and the sick would find healing. The imagery of the third day hints at Jesus’ resurrection, for on the third day he would rise even when the power of rulers would try to stop him.

I imagine you can think of foxes today, those who try to take advantage of their position of power and create chaos. Even in our own nation, we’re watching a struggle for power, for the control of what’s true and what’s not. Some foxes are trying to convince us about what to believe, even though plenty of evidence shows otherwise. Some try to slyly convince us about conspiracy theories, twisting reality to fit their own agendas.

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Beyond our own shores, one Russian leader strives to convince the world that his invasion of Ukraine is the right thing to do, even spreading misinformation to his own people about the purpose of the invasion. While that sly fox tries to convince his own people, the rest of the world looks on with grief and agony and disapproval.

Along with condemning the sly fox of Herod, Jesus used another image—that of a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings, offering protection. He echoes the avian imagery of the prophet Isaiah who suggested that God lifts up the weary on eagles' wings. Listeners may have also recalled Psalm 17: "Hide me in the protection of your wings, away from the wicked who are out to get me."

In the face of the foxes of the world, many hens have come to offer protection, as echoed in these three statements heard through our relief

efforts through our Week of Compassion partners and offerings:³

"My husband is on the frontlines. The women of my family have decided to take our children away from danger. ... We went where the car was taking us, I don't remember most of the journey. My children were asking where are we going and I couldn't come up with an answer. ... My sister is still on the way, I have no idea where she or my nieces are.

We also have a lot of [internally displaced persons]. Our community tries to gather help for them. There is a lack of everything. The stores are half-empty. Pharmacies also. People cannot find most basic and urgent items. There is big lack of basic medicines for injured. A lot of ordinary people try to donate what they have to those in need.

Yelena, mother of 3 said: We've been standing here at this border checkpoint for more than 5 hours, it is cold and my children are freezing. It is amazing to see that people are here to help, and even just talking to you gives us hope for a better future."

Jesus recognized there were foxes and hens in the world when he lived, and they still exist today. As we continue our Lenten journey to Easter over the next several weeks, you can decide which to follow—the foxes or the hens. May we all choose wisely whether to follow the sly deception of foxes or to offer the safety of the wings of a hen.

² Luke 13:32, *The Message*.

³ www.weekofcompassion.org/stories/the-latest-on-ukraine

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod_the_Great