

Determined to Crush Desolation

† the fox and the hen

In the Name of Jesus our determined Savior, dear fellow disciples under the cross:

How good are you at shortcuts? A brother of mine in our youth making cookies read that the recipe called for ¼ cup of coffee. He didn't realize he was taking a shortcut until we were all chewing coffee grounds in his cookies. Takes less time if you don't brew it.

Some shortcuts are just annoying. How many times have I hurried something, only to hear my Granddad's voice ringing in my ears, "Haste makes waste." Wish I'd thought that before it was too late.

Jesus' temptations in the desert last Sunday were all about shortcuts, weren't they? *Use a personal miracle to make some bread for your hunger. Bypass all that suffering on the cross to gain glory and power – just by worshiping the devil. Don't suffer, just test God to see if He loves you enough to send protective angels when you jump off this temple wall.* In youth, middle age, our sunset years – we all face temptations to shortcut suffering under the cross for instant glory now. Result? **Desolation.**

Thank God our blessed Savior, the Friend of sinners, was so **Determined**, not to avoid suffering in our place, but to suffer it head on and so save us from our own destruction. Jesus was **Determined to Crush Desolation.** And He shows us this, of all things, by **the fox and the hen.**

Most of what Americans know about foxes seems to be from cartoons. Maybe they're wily and sly, but so cute and harmless, right? But if you raised chickens, prized for their eggs with sweet little chicks, how would the fox in the henhouse seem after a violent spray of blood and feathers? Foxes can sure be determined. I saw a fox run right up a tree chasing a squirrel over here in Snail Lake Park. If you lost some pets to fox forays, maybe the story about George Washington wouldn't seem so harsh.

According to David McCullough in 1776, George Washington kept a detailed diary that included one fox hunt that lasted seven hours on horseback. The fox got away. The next Saturday, they were riding hard again after the same fox. Six hours later they got him. No more dead chickens; one less fox.

It seems that Jesus' emphasis here calling King Herod "*that fox,*" is more deadly and dangerous than wily or sly. Jesus' enemies were trying to shortcut Him out of Galilee. If they could scare Jesus into running away, they could even make Him look like coward. *Some Pharisees came to him and said, "Leave, and go away from here, because Herod wants to kill you."* (EHV) This was Herod Antipas who beheaded John the Baptist just because a dancing girl asked for John's head on a platter. Like the rest of the family, Herod Antipas was as bloody as their father King Herod the Great who murdered the baby boys in Bethlehem. Staying away from any of the Herods would seem to make sense, wouldn't it?

Yet Jesus isn't backing down. He is **Determined to Crush Desolation**, but in a way that seems so strange to any reasoning adult. Jesus said to them, *"Go tell that fox, 'Look, I am going to drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal. Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the next day, because it cannot be that a prophet would be killed outside Jerusalem!'"* Really, Jesus? That's your plan? Healing the sick, exorcising demons – then you'll die in Jerusalem when you're good and ready? Determined, but strange?

Maybe not so strange if you stop and think about our "cancel culture." Used to be if someone said something you didn't like, you'd just walk away. But now some demand you stop speaking unless they like what you say. It's the way of the world far more than we realize, especially when it comes to the LORD's prophets like Jeremiah in today's First Reading. *Everything the LORD had commanded him,*

Jeremiah dutifully preached. No sooner did Jeremiah finish, but *the priests, the prophets, and all the people seized him and said, “You must die!”* Cancel you, buddy! Preaching that the LORD would destroy their capital city and His own temple was a capital crime to them. But did Jeremiah back down? Not at all! *Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and to all the people, “The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the things that you have heard. Now reform your ways and your actions, and obey the LORD your God. Then the LORD will relent and not bring about the disaster he has pronounced against you. But as for me, look, I am in your hands. Do with me whatever seems good and right in your eyes. But you can be certain of this. If you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live here, for it is true that the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing.”* (Jeremiah 26:8–15)

Jesus was fully aware that Herod could cut Him to pieces like a fox with sharp claws and teeth – but not unless the Lord allowed. Jesus was on His *Resolute Journey* to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51 – 19:44), and nothing and no one would stop Him from getting there. Jesus was determined to die, but why?

Could it have anything to do with the shortcuts we take? Challenges, even suffering comes your way as it does to everyone, but do you ever ask, “Why me, Lord?” – as if He doesn’t know what He’s doing? Maybe you’ve even questioned why the Lord made the world the way He did – as if a paradise would have been better? It was! Until Adam and Eve ruined it by their rebellion. Husbands, ever blamed your wife as Adam did? Wives, ever disrespected your husband instead of admitting when you’re wrong? Teens, ever questioned how God made you? Shortcut surgeries to so-called happiness are permanently scarring young people today, but they do nothing to deal with the real problems we all face as teenagers and adults. Being who you are can be scary unless you rely on Jesus. We’re up against the fallen angel from hell who does all he can to get couples together before they’re married, then tear them apart afterwards. We all need to know how **Determined** Jesus is to **Crush Desolation**.

Can you hear the beating heart of God in this? Can you see how intent Jesus is to love sinners to death? Can you catch the kindness and the warning in His words? *“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I have wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you will say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’”* They’ll be singing all about Jesus as the King, come Palm Sunday in Jerusalem. Only Christ and His blessing can **Crush Desolation** from unbelief.

My dear friends, you just don’t know how much God loves you. You just don’t realize how earnestly He desires you to have peace in your heart with heaven as your friend. So He keeps telling us over and over again, every way He can in His Holy Word, the Bible, and visibly in His promises of forgiveness coupled with water, bread and wine. Your sins are forgiven. Your **Desolation** is past. God put it all on Jesus when He carried His cross up that hill called Golgotha and shed the only innocent blood that could wash away all sin, all guilt, every reason for God to be angry with you or you afraid of Him.

There’s an old story about two forest rangers checking out the damage among smoldering tree trunks and stumps after a fire. As they walked around, one called to the other, “You’ve got to see this!” It made his heart jump into his throat. Right next to a burned out tree stood a mother hen as rigid as death from that hot fire. One of the rangers gently tapped her with his foot so that her carcass fell over. And then he gasped. Out from under the hen ran some tiny chicks that had been hiding under her wings. She had called them in the smoke and gathered them under her wings. As the flames enveloped her, she stood solid and strong, shielding her chicks with her body. They lived because she willingly died for them.

As the firestorm of God’s wrath is gathering for Judgment Day, Jesus keeps calling for you and me to hide under the shelter of His wings. Now is the time. Today is the day. Hiding here with Jesus also makes us **Determined to Crush Desolation** in blessings of peace for others, especially the hurting. *“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”* Come, one and all, to Jesus. Shelter here! Amen.