



St. Anne's Episcopal Parish
Church Circle • Annapolis, MD • 21401

Parish Offices & Education Building
located at 199 Duke of Gloucester St.
Annapolis, MD 21401

Phone: 410-267-9333
Fax: 410-280-3181
www.stannes-annapolis.org

Amy Richter
2 Lent C: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Luke 13:31-35
February 28, 2010
St Anne's Episcopal Church, Annapolis, MD
A Lion or a Fox?

All of our readings today are about having faith, not fear.

“Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield,” God says to Abram.
(Genesis 15:1)

The psalmist has us sing these words, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1)

Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. Jesus says this a lot in the gospels, to anyone who will listen to him. It's a scary world out there and Jesus knows it. We are afraid of so much. Here is Max Lucado's list: “We fear being sued, finishing last, going broke; we fear the mole on the back, the new kid on the block, the sound of the clock as it ticks us closer to the grave. . . Fear is the big bully in the high school hallway: brash, loud, and unproductive. For all the noise fear makes and room it takes, fear does little good. Fear never wrote a symphony or poem, negotiated a peace treaty, or cured a disease. Fear never pulled a family out of poverty or a country out of bigotry. Fear never saved a marriage or a business. Courage did that. Faith did that. People who refused to consult or cower to their timidities did that. But fear itself? Fear herds us into a prison and slams the doors.”¹

Jesus wants to get us out of that prison. In today's gospel we see his response when his opponents want to frighten him. They've been trying to get rid of him by arguing with him, testing him, calling him names, and ridiculing the people Jesus associates with. Today they try another tactic: they try to scare him. They tell him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants

¹ Max Lucado, *Fearless*, chapter 1.

to kill you!” The threat is a real one. Herod has already killed John the Baptist, the one who pointed to Jesus, and said, “I’m not the important one here—he is. Pay attention to Jesus!” Herod killed John; the threat to Jesus’ life could be real.

Jesus responds, not with fear, but with faith--faith in the perspective and plans of God. Faith in the perspective and plans of God allows Jesus to escape the trap of fear.

Here’s what I mean. First, viewing the situation through faith in the perspective of God allows Jesus to cut the threat down to size. To those who want Jesus to be afraid of Herod, Jesus replies, “Go and tell that fox for me . . .” He calls Herod “that fox.” We may think of foxes as crafty and sly, quick, and devious. They may be small, but they can wreak havoc in a chicken coop before the farmer has any idea what’s going on. I see the foxes running through the woods by Hunt Meadows where we live, and they go fast, darting between bushes and trees. People in Jesus’ time would also have thought of foxes as crafty and sly. But what Jesus is also saying is that Herod is *just* a fox.

In Jesus’ day, when someone calls someone else a fox, they could be making a comparison, and the animal they would compare with a fox is a lion. Herod is a *fox* not, a *lion*. In one ancient Jewish text, someone writes this about a person first thought to be great but who turned out to be quite inept: “the lion you mentioned turned out to be a [mere] fox.” In another place, someone criticizes others for consulting with amateurs rather than experts. He says, “There are lions before you, and you ask foxes?”² Herod thought of himself as a lion. “The Lion of Judah” he would have called himself, the King. But Jesus sees him for what he really is, a small fry, a peon, a poser. Dangerous, sure. People often are who lack self-esteem and depend on putting others down in order to derive a twisted sense of self-worth. But, in the perspective of God, Herod is no lion. Herod is just a fox.

Are there any fears of ours that need cutting down to size? Are there any of our fears that from our vantage point look like lions, but really may, in fact, when we get all the information, or see them from a big picture perspective, turn out to be foxes? “Well, what I am afraid of is kind of

² The quotations are from the Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud. Randall Buth, Jerusalem Perspective; [www. JerusalemPerspective.com](http://www.JerusalemPerspective.com).

reddish orange, and it's furry, and it makes some noise." But when we get much closer, it is not, after all, the king of the jungle we feared it might be? Sometimes the reality check is helpful.

Are there any of our fears that need cutting down to size? Cutting down by being shared? There is an African proverb that says, "When spider webs unite, they tie up lions."³ Is there something lion-sized in your life that would be so much smaller if you shared it?

But there are things we confront, things that threaten to devour us, that really are as fierce as they're advertized to be. And finding out that the thing we were busy looking up in our field guide really is a lion may not bring us much comfort when we're staring at it up close and it's all teeth and muscle and fast and ferocious and we feel like we don't stand a chance. Because we don't. By ourselves, we do not stand a chance.

And that's why what Jesus says next is important. Jesus has faith, not only in the perspective of God, but in the plans of God. Jesus says, "Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work." Basically, he says, "I've got work to do. The Almighty Heavenly One, the One in whom I trust, has given me work to do. I've got far too much work to do to waste my time being afraid of you." Jesus is on a mission: heal, cure, set free, then go to the cross, where he will take on all the forces of fury and destruction the world and the evil one can muster. He has no time for fear, because he has faith in the plans of God. He will go to the cross, and all the forces of death and evil will rage against the powers of good, baring their teeth and claws, roaring and tearing, even killing. And it will look for all the world like a lion has made short work of a hen.

But Jesus knows better. Jesus trusts that in his ultimate act of self-giving love, even dying on the cross, the last enemy has been defeated. Death has been defeated. Hatred and cowardice and fear have all been defeated.

There are some things that if were we to face them by ourselves, we do not stand a chance. But, in Jesus, we are never by ourselves. Jesus

³ In a paper written by the Rt. Rev. John L. Rabb, "The Church Will Rebuild the City," for the Episcopal Urban Caucus, 2009.

Christ is always present, always by our side. Like a mother hen, longing to gather her chicks under her wings. Longing to remind us of the perspective and plans and promises of God. Promises kept in Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus, these words are true, promises to remind us of the perspective and plans of God: the Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?" Whatever may happen to us, we will not be destroyed, for nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:39). In the perspective of God, is the source of our fear a lion? A fox? A flea?

Here is Jesus' stance against fear: trusting in the perspective and plans of God, he cuts it down to size and knows whatever he faces, it is no match for the power and love of God.

Amen.