

# *Straight from the "Hart"*

February 25, 2024



## **Making a Fresh Start (3): Heartbroken Determination**

Welcome to Hartland UMC's "Straight from the "Hart"". We are glad you are here and participating in worship through this service script.

**A Lent Pilgrimage Affirmation** (P – Pastor C - Congregation)

P: Do you believe in God?

**C: We believe in one God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We believe that our lives are held within the encircling love of God, who knows our names and recognizes our deepest needs.**

P: Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

**C: We believe that Christ is the divine Child of the living God, and that his grace is like living waters that can never be exhausted. We proclaim Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen One, confessing him as Lord to the glory of God the Father. We acclaim Jesus as the Lord of the church, the head over all things, the beginning of a new creation.**

P: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

**C: We believe in the birthing, renewing, enabling Spirit of God who yearns over our welfare as a mother yearns for her child.**

P: We acknowledge that we live and work between the time of Christ's death and resurrection -- and the final consummation of all things which he will bring. We are a pilgrim people, always on the way towards the promised goal.

**C: We believe that our journey has a purpose and a destination, and on the way, Christ feeds us with word and sacrament, and we have the gift of the Holy Spirit in order that we may not lose the way.**

P: We will live and work within the faith and unity of the one holy [universal] Church, bearing witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and his will.

**C: We believe that in the church we are fellow pilgrims on the road, and that we are called to love one another as God loves us.**

P: We affirm that every member of the church is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified.

**C: Together with all the people of God, we will serve the world for which Christ died, and we await with hope the day of the Lord Jesus.**

adapted and blended from "An adaptation from the *Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia*" [beswick.info](http://beswick.info); and from "Traveling to Easter with Jesus as our Guide", The Order of Saint Columba. [patmosabbey.org](http://patmosabbey.org)

**Opening Prayer**

Merciful God, the gifts we bring are so small in comparison to the vast needs in our world, or even to meet the needs of our community. Yet we have brought what we can. As you once multiplied the five small loaves and two fish, multiply these gifts so that needs will be met and more in the rushing scramble of our lives, we have come to escape the negatives of our humanity to this place to find relief in your quieting presence, a common purpose, and a unifying spirit.

adapted from "Offering prayer inspired by Matthew 14:13-21) by Christine Longhurst, [worship.blogspot.com](http://worship.blogspot.com) and from a portion of "Psalm Paraphrase: 122,123" by Francis McNab, [stmichales.org.au](http://stmichales.org.au)

**Call to Worship**

We come to worship this morning from different places and for different reasons. We experience the presence of the Spirit in different ways. We hear Jesus' words with different ears when he says: "Deny yourselves. Take up Your Cross. Follow Me." Despite our differences, we have gathered as one so that God will draw near to us in this place and in our lives.

adapted from "Call to Worship" (based on Psalm 22, Psalm 71:12, Matthew 16:24-26, Mark 8:31-38)" by Joanna Harader, [spaciousfaith.com](http://spaciousfaith.com)

**Music**

Before we can take up our cross, we need to remember what it meant that Jesus picked up his cross for us. Let's sing

**Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed**

Words: Isaac Watts, 1707 Music: Attr. to Hugh Wilson, 1827

1. Alas! and did my Savior bleed, and did my Sovereign die!  
Would he devote that sacred head for sinners such as I?
2. Was it for crimes that I have done, he groaned upon the tree?  
Amazing pity! Grace unknown! And love beyond degree!
3. Well might the sun in darkness hide, and shut its glories in,  
when God, the mighty maker, died for his own creature's sin.
5. But drops of tears can ne'er repay the debt of love I owe.  
Here, Lord, I give myself away; 'tis all that I can do.

## Lenten Cross Candles

We extinguished the Ashen “*Return*” Candle, recognizing how challenging it is to heed God’s call to return to him daily in order to stay on his spiritual course for us. (extinguish candle 1).

We extinguished the “Resist” Candle, recognizing how challenging it is to resist the temptations of life. (extinguish candle 2).

This week’s candle is labeled “**resolve**”.

Once upon a time, an average man with a large suitcase got off a train in Cheekyville. His name was William Warbler. He had one very unusual habit. He *always* communicated by singing. Even if he was just saying Hello, he would clear his voice and say: ♪ "Gooood dayyy to youuuuuuuuu....!"

This unusual habit made people think strangely about him. No one knew how he made his living. It was clear that he lived simply. Because of his odd quirk and his humble clothes, some people avoided him, and others taunted him.

A few years later a rumor spread through Cheekyville that William Warbler had gotten a leading role in a very important opera in big city. There were posters everywhere advertising the event. It was a great success and ran for many weeks. All the people of Cheekyville decided to rent a bus and go hear him for the final show. It went very well.

After the show ended, the Cheekyvillians were in the crowd while William was being interviewed by reporters. They were shocked to hear him speak in a clear, pleasant and courteous talking voice -- for they had never heard him do anything but sing.

From then on, William sang only during his extensive practice times and stage appearances and world tours. Some did not understand. But they would have if they had seen what was inside his suitcase. It was a large stone, with a hand-carved message on it. It said: "Practice, my boy. Practice every second. For you never know when your chance will come."

No one in the town knew that he got the role in the opera because the director had heard William at a newsstand singing ♪ “I would like the daily news, please...”

This week, we extinguish the Candle we named “Resolve”, recognizing how challenging it is to persist when life offers resistance and discouraging setbacks. (extinguish candle 3).

Paul reminds us why we resolve to push on.



**Responsive Reading 1** (R – Reader, C – Congregation)

R: The holy accomplishments we thought had earned our goodness we now consider worthless in light of what Christ has done.

**C: Nothing compares to the infinite value of knowing Christ.**

R: For him, we have given up everything, and we discover that everything is nothing when we gain Christ through faith.

**C: We want to know Christ and experience his resur-rection power in us.**

R: As we die in him, we are granted resurrection in him. Not that we have already reached this goal, but we press on to take hold of that perfection for which Christ Jesus has taken hold of us and made us his own.

**C: We forget what is behind and eagerly strain toward what is ahead. We press on to receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.**

R: Live up to the spiritual maturity to which you have already grown. Follow the examples of those who model their lives according to the example of Christ. Weep over those who live as enemies of the cross of Christ, who only think about earthly concerns, who chase after worldly passions, who are proud of shameful things, and whose ultimate end is destruction. But our citizenship is in heaven, from where our Savior is returning. He will transform our weak mortal bodies into glorious bodies like his.

**C: He will do this with the same power by which he will become ruler over all things.**

Based on Philippians 3:7-21 (NIV, NLT)

**Music** Paul clarifies for us that we never stop striving, but in this striving it is not to earn our worth by our own goodness, but that we will draw closer to Christ so that he can better fulfill his mission through us, and that can only be accomplished as we trust him more and more. Let's sing

**'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus**

Words: Louisa M. R. Stead, c. 1882, Music: William J. Kirkpatrick, 1882

1. 'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, and to take him at his word;  
just to rest upon his promise, and to know, "Thus saith the Lord."

## Refrain

Jesus, Jesus, how I trust him! How I've proved him o'er and o'er!  
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus! O for grace to trust him more!

3. Yes, 'tis sweet to trust in Jesus, just from sin and self to cease;  
just from Jesus simply taking life and rest, and joy and peace.

## Refrain

4. I'm so glad I learned to trust thee, precious Jesus, Savior, friend;  
and I know that thou art with me, wilt be with me to the end.

## Refrain

**Music** And as we get to know him more and what he has done and does do for us to the end, in trust we follow his example and do for others what he has done for us. Let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing [Song Title]

**Freely, Freely**

Words and Music: Carol Owens, © 1972 Communiqué Music, Inc.

God forgave my sin in Jesus' name,  
I've been born again in Jesus' name;  
and in Jesus' name I come to you,  
to share his love as he told me to.

## Chorus

He said: 'Freely, freely, you have received, Freely, freely give.  
Go in my name, and because you believe, others will know that I live.'

**Prayers** Father, you know us and you love us. You have called us to be your followers, and we ask you today to help us to answer that call — not with lip service only, but with a determination to offer all our lives. The path we must follow doesn't promise to be easy, but we know it will ultimately lead to life more abundant. Remove our fears and doubts and help us follow through on our resolve to say "yes." to your ways and your will because we love you. Father, and we want to follow you. ....

We give praise again for the good reports we heard last week, and we pray for their continued progress. \* The LaRoy's daughter requested prayers for those suffering with nerve pain, \* the Gordoniers' request prayers for their friend Al who will be getting his artificial leg this week. \* We continue to pray for \* for Don Wilkinson \* for Stephen Brittain, \* for Lisa \* for Jan Martin, who says hi and misses us and is not doing well but doing the best she can – she is no longer in Caretel, but can welcome non-contagious visitors, just call to see where she is... \* and certainly there are people we have not named, but we pray \* for those who are not feeling well in any way shape or form, \* for those facing challenges of any kind, \* for our church, our community, and ourselves – for whatever needs we may be facing \* we ask for your peace in our hearts, homes, and world.

Thank you for inviting us to participate in furthering your kingdom through service to each other and our community and we ask that this Lenten journey to the cross with you may be meaningful, in the name of the One who showed us how to live and taught us to pray **Lord's Prayer**

**Special Music** Living out the prayer may at times call us to take up a cross and face difficult circumstances. Ballington Booth, like Paul, reminds us that anything we go through doesn't compare to what Christ did and does, and the joy of his presence makes it worth it all. Listen to us sing



### **The Cross is Not Greater**

Words and Music: Ballington Booth, 1892

1 The cross that he gave may be heavy, but it ne'er outweighs his grace;  
the storm that I feared may surround me, but it ne'er excludes his face.

Refrain

The cross is not greater than his grace, the storm cannot hide his blessed face;  
I am satisfied to know that with Jesus here below, I can conquer ev'ry foe.

2 The thorns in my path are not sharper than composed his crown for me;  
The cup which I drink not more bitter than he drank in Gethsemane.

Refrain

3 The light of his love shineth brighter, as it falls on paths of woe;  
The toil of my work groweth lighter, as I stoop to raise the low.

Refrain

4 His will have I joy in fulfilling, as I'm walking in his sight;  
My all to the blood I am bringing, it alone can keep me right.

Refrain

### **Intro to and Bible Reading 2**

His love shines brighter, the work gets lighter, there is joy in doing his will and living rightly. God and his grace are with us in every storm and every burden that we must carry. But it is up to us to choose to carry the cross that puts to death in

us the temptations to ignore heavenly concerns, to live according to worldly ambitions, to not live ethically or faithfully, which ultimately may lead to destruction.

Jesus told his followers that he had to go to Jerusalem to be killed and raised. Peter took Jesus aside and protested that this should never happen to his Lord. Jesus took Peter's rebuke as a temptation to trip him up, encouraging him to worry only about his life here on earth and to not faithfully follow God's will to the end. Jesus crucified the temptation by telling Peter he only had in mind mere human concerns, and not the concerns of God. Then he says that what he will do spiritually and physically, we must do spiritually. Jesus said to his disciples:

See Matthew 16:21-24a

If anyone desires to be My disciple, let him deny himself [disregard, lose sight of, and forget himself and his own interests] and take up his cross and follow Me [cleave steadfastly to Me, conform wholly to My example in living and, if need be, in dying, also]. For whoever is bent on saving his [temporal] life [his comfort and security here] shall lose it [eternal life]; and whoever loses his life [his comfort and security here] for My sake shall find it [life everlasting]. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life [his blessed life in the kingdom of God]? Or what would a man give as an exchange for his [blessed] life [in the kingdom of God]? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory (majesty, splendor) of His Father with His angels, and then He will render account and reward every man in accordance with what he has done.

Matthew 16:24b-27 (AMPC)

**Music** The definition of a disciple in the first century was someone who literally left everything to physically follow a leader. Our modern definition is one who prioritizes the values and practices of a person or activity or belief system and incorporates them into their own life's setting. In the context of our faith then, we seek God to guide us to be like Jesus above our personal preferences and despite what fears that may create in us. Let's sing

### **Shepherd Me, O God (2x)**

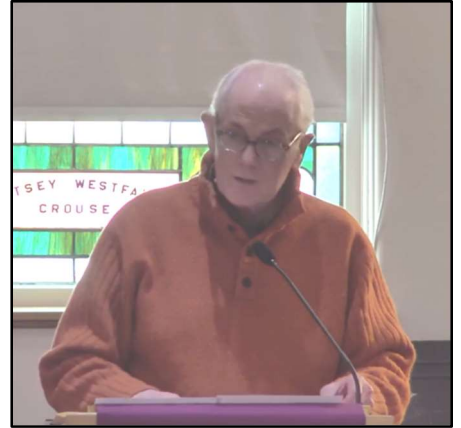
Words and Music: Marty Haugen © 1986 GIA Publications, Inc

Shepherd Me, O God, beyond my wants,  
beyond my fears, from death into life.

Repeat

## Intro to and Bible Reading 3

Of course, not everyone wants to be led in this way – they want to crave and chase their unhealthy desires, they prefer to cower in the face of their fears and be driven by them into wrong actions or inaction ... they reject the One who can bring the truly abundant life. Many religious leaders fell into this category, and as a result, they were escalating their conflict with Jesus.



Jesus was teaching in various town and villages as he was making his way toward Jerusalem for the final time.

He was probably in Perea – and area east of the Jordan River that was under Herod’s jurisdiction. Jesus taught that people (including Gentiles) will come from everywhere to God’s heavenly banquet, but warning his opposition of their ultimate exclusion because they refuse to acknowledge God and will not try to enter the kingdom until it is too late. Now we pick up the story ... (See Luke 13:1-30)

That same day some of the proud religious law-keepers came to Jesus. They said, “Go away from here! Herod wants to kill You.” Jesus said to them, “Go and tell that fox, ‘See. I put out demons and heal the sick. I will do these things today and tomorrow. And the third day My work will be finished.’ But I must go on My way today and tomorrow and the day after. One who speaks for God cannot die except at Jerusalem. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you kill the early preachers and throw stones on those sent to you. How many times I wanted to gather your children around me, as a bird gathers her young under her wings, but you would not let Me. See! Your house is empty. And I tell you, you will not see Me again until the time comes when you will say, ‘Great and honored is the One Who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Luke 13:31-35 (NLV)

**Music** Jesus longed for people to gather to God, but many refused, and Jesus mourns. Many refuse today, yet Jesus, often through us, continues to call people to gather to him. Let’s stand, if comfortable, before the sermon and sing

### Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling

Words and Music: Will L. Thompson, 1880

1. Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling, calling for you and for me;  
see, on the portals he's waiting and watching, watching for you and for me.



## Refrain

Come home, come home; ye who are weary come home;  
earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling, calling, O sinner, come home!

2. Why should we tarry when Jesus is pleading, pleading for you and for me?  
Why should we linger and heed not his mercies, mercies for you and for me?

## Refrain

4. O for the wonderful love he has promised, promised for you and for me!  
Though we have sinned, he has mercy and pardon, pardon for you and for me.

## Refrain

**Sermon Heartbroken Determination**

Jesus longs for people to respond to his ministry, and mourns when it is refused, even though he knew it would happen. He taught as he traveled through the Transjordan toward Jerusalem. The area was mostly rough desert with a few pockets of well cultivated areas in Jesus' day. And while it was primarily inhabited by Jews, the religious leaders there did not have a lot of influence. Luke doesn't tell us why they warned Jesus about Herod. It is possible that they were angered by unlawful Sabbath healings and unorthodox teachings and were attempting to get Jesus to go back into the hands of religious leaders who had more power to deal with Jesus than they did.

Or, since Herod had already beheaded John the Baptist, rumors (true or false) that Herod was out to kill Jesus as well was very plausible, and these leaders may have been sincerely concerned about his safety.

Either way, Jesus did not heed their warning. He gives them a message for Herod, that fox. Unlike a lion, whose great strength allows it to be direct (if it wants to be) -- a "fox", in Jewish idiom, refers to someone who is dishonorable and can only succeed by indirect trickery and cunning. The message for Herod is that he will continue at his ministry for three days -- not literally 3 days, it was a common poetical expression to mean "until something is perfected, or completed, or finished". Jesus will not run from Herod. He will continue his mission of saving people from their spiritual and physical need until his mission *is finished*. He adds that not Herod, but Jerusalem gets the first claim on the blood of God's messengers.

**Determination**

Jesus is determined. Christ longs to save those who are lost, and is resolved to make it happen, and mourns when the people

refuse to believe in him, for they have chosen destruction over belief. And when the ultimate Palm Sunday occurs in the day of Lord that is yet to come, all these people that have refused to believe in him will finally recognize him for who he is - and will say "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord" -- but it will be too late.

### Heartbroken

Jesus is heartbroken. Jesus mourns how despite his great devotion and sacrifice, he has been unable to gather his people, unable to lead them to spiritual and temporal safety, unable to protect them against coming judgments. They refused the Messiah who had come seeking to bless them; and so now their house is left to them – or as today's version says it – it is left empty – and by that he meant that according to Jewish thought, God's presence on earth was in the Temple, and God had left his Temple. His presence and protection is withdrawn, and now it is just a human building awaiting its own destruction.

Paul also mourns those who reject their appeal to believe in Jesus and then encourages those who do believe to press forward with great resolve to live their lives after the example of Jesus Christ, who has made us his own people by his sacrifice on the cross...

This story is about Jesus' dogged determination and effort to do everything with his life -- and death -- to offer himself to a people who had a choice to receive or reject him -- and the glorious joy for those who choose to become children of God, and the deep grief he has for those who choose to try and control their own destiny in their own strength without a Savior or shepherd.

Let's play all the angles and see how we fit into the story. We have three main characters -- The fox, the hen, and the chicks. But first, let's make sure we look at them with the right attitude...

There are places in the world where a particular system rules society and if people do not at least outwardly comply they are physically destroyed. In other places, physical destruction is not allowed except by the state, but there is a war of words. It is still a fairly direct attack, and the words said treat others as if they were dead. The Bible says that rejoicing in the idea of hate and the destruction of another is missing the attitude of Christ. John tells us that if we hate our brother or sister we are guilty of murder. (1 John 3:14-16) Jesus says the same thing. Hate, labeling brothers or sisters as idiots and fools is subject to judgment and puts the hater in danger of hell. (Matthew 5:21-22) Why? Because the *spirit* of God's law is about

reconciliation and healthy relationships. The physical act of murder was the ultimate manifestation named by Moses, but it begins in the heart, and to hate and despise and label others is an attitude that at its essence is saying, “I wish you didn’t exist” – that is an attitudinal murder, and diametrically opposed to the spirit of Moses’ law and of Jesus’ direct command to love as he has loved us. (John 13:34-35, 15:9ff)

Some may try to get around the text by quoting the first passages and saying that they are about brothers and sisters (the faith family) and not those outside the faith. Some might take it a step further and say that if someone believes this or that, then in spite of what they say about “being a Christian” they are not, and therefore they are outside of the faith. And then some take it a step further by saying that because we believe they are outside the faith, then it is all right to hate them and call them foolish. Wow, can we really use what we want out of the Bible.

These arguments fall flat because Jesus says “Love as I loved you”. When did Jesus begin to love us? Before or after we entered the faith? [Before]. The only reason we have an opportunity to be part of the faith family is because God’s love and grace reaches out to us before we even knew him. We declare that truth every time we baptize a child who is too young to make a confession of faith in their own strength. And to really nail it down, it is only a handful of verses later in the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:43 ff.) that Jesus goes on to say -- “You heard it said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy--” and I could divert there and talk about the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29 ff.) where two lived out that saying, but it was a bitter religious and racial enemy who turns out to be neighbor rather than his own people; and Jesus answers the original saying by teaching, “*But I say* love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; that you may be children (take on the characteristics) of your heavenly father”. Pretty clear to me.

Therefore, Paul weeps for the enemies of the cross. Jesus mourns over Jerusalem whom he clearly understands was already laying the groundwork to crucify him on the cross. Yet he yearns for them and mourns over them.

Compare that to a large church gathering I attended years ago. The preacher told a story about a pastor who made an decision that was considered not just by this speaker. The long-term results were that that pastor and church suffered difficult consequences. And this great gathering of Christians were whooping it up and clapping and praising -- because someone suffered (allegedly for being misguided in their beliefs and decision-making). Maybe there was a direct correlation, and

maybe there wasn't – I don't know the details of the story well enough to know that. Was the suffering pastor and congregation wrong? Probably. Should we rejoice when someone suffers for being wrong? [No.] Jesus called it ungodly and murderous.

### The Fox

Now let's get to the fox, now that we know how we are supposed to feel about people who are different from us. When an attack cannot be direct; physically or by words; then it us usually by stealth. It comes up to us from the side, cunningly sneaking up so that no alarms are sounded, and lures the chicks off of the true path of faith and away from the safety of the hen until there is an opportune time to destroy their faith. I like to think that this is not any of us. That we are not deliberate or inadvertently foxes -- who make errors in judgment and thus lead people away from truth; or who whoop it up because a fellow Christian failed, and in our joy unintentionally model a murderous spirit that leads to more wall building and less bridge building, more hurting and divided hearts and less healing and wholeness, fewer reconciled relationships that the *spirit* of the Law and that Jesus came to offer to the world. When people obey God, the world spins peacefully on its axis. When people ignore God, the whole planet wobbles. If the world were filled with hardy and hearty souls, foxes would not bother us so much.

### Fox followers By Choice Fooled Helplessness

But the world is filled with pale yellow chicks and plenty of dangerous foxes. Some chicks are huddled out in the open where anything with claws can get to them. Others have taken to following these foxes around. Sometimes it is a deliberate choice. They say, "I know this is a fox, but I deliberately and willingly choose to follow it anyway, because I think he or she will get something done that I want done." It could just as easily mean the chick is fooled. They are misled, thinking the fox is not a fox. Remember those first moments Little Red Riding Hood entered Grandma's house. She could sense something wasn't quite right, "what big eyes... what big teeth..." but she couldn't quite get there at that point of the story, and thus she put herself in danger...

Sometimes the chick follows because it feels it has no choice. We feel we are powerless to fight the trends of the "powers that be". Do you think every Jew in Jerusalem wanted to crucify Jesus? Probably not. And while some may have actively protested, many went along with the plans of the palace and the synagogue because they felt like they were powerless to do anything about it; and

the best way to survive was to not make waves against the existing power structures.

### The hen

Against these, Jesus offers himself as a hen. I think we would have preferred Isaiah's majestic eagle or Hosea's stealthy leopard or the proud lion of Judah swatting foxes away like they were ladybugs. Compared to these, the mother hen does not inspire a whole lot of confidence.

### Hen followers Protected

And yet the mother hen is a determined animal who would give her life rather than abandon her chicks to the fox. At great risk to herself, she extends her soft warm wings to gather her children. Gathered under her wings, the chicks are no longer chicken. With security against foxy oppressors, they no longer live bound by fear and control, but live confidently in Christ's name.

That protection comes at a cost. When the fox comes, the mother has no rippling muscles, no fangs, no serious claws. All she has is her body to keep between the fox and the chicks. If the fox is going to get to the chicks, it has to go through the hen.

And we know that one night, the foxes came to the garden (of Gethsemane) while the chicks were asleep (for the third time). And when the hen sounded the warning the chicks scatter and with wings spread and heart exposed, the foxes crucify the hen. If we are truly chicks of the heavenly hen, then we will take on the characteristics of the hen. So what are the characteristics of the hen? I've already mentioned some of them, let's hit them again real quick.

### Hen characteristics - Heartbroken

The first is being heartbroken for others who do not gather under God's wings. I've already discussed this, so I will just say this: some tend to judge and be angry with those who haven't experienced grace the same way they have experienced grace. But Jesus didn't seek revenge -- he wept and mourned and longed and yearned. Like the father of the prodigal son, who saw him a long way off, which by implication means he was always searching the horizon for him and his return. (Luke 15:3-32, esp v 20) How often are we heartbroken for others and their situations (even if they are self-inflicted)? It is this that drives us to prayer, toward understanding, and to actions of compassionate care.

One of my friends was on the golf course not too long ago. (He is in Florida). He golfs with people whose views are quite different from his own. He was expressing some of these attitudes of compassion with his friends, rather than returning an

argument, put on him one of those derogatory labels that accused him of being “weak” and “vulnerable”. And his answer was that his attitude was the attitude of Jesus, who was the biggest one of “that derogatory label” of all. Their answer to that was that they didn’t read those parts of the Bible, because it “doesn’t work” meaning they rejected those parts of Jesus’ teaching because it didn’t fit in with their way of living out their belief system, so they ignored it. Heartbroken.

**- Vulnerable**

This leads to the second hen characteristic: vulnerable. They are vulnerable. Jesus did not overpower or force himself on anyone. He was not a fox of a different color, snatching them from one oppressive belief system only to join another. Instead, he opened his arms – but he did not make anyone walk into them. He stood, and then hung; arms wide and heart bared --



fully vulnerable. There is no power, no control, no manipulation -- it is a stance of true love. And with this stance we can choose to reject or allow Jesus to enter our lives.

**- Present with us**

A third hen characteristic is that if we allow it, if we accept and go to his arms, there is a personal presence with the mother hen, under his wings. God didn’t complain from his throne in heaven, “Look how bad they are getting to be!” He didn’t criticize from a distance; as some are so likely to do in our world today. Jesus entered into the lives of hurting people and accepted them, hurt with them, worked with them, helped them, healed them, blessed them; he didn’t force, but offered to them an opportunity to explore and journey in a new way of living – tucked closely under his loving wings. How often do we roll up our sleeves and get involved and offer God’s loving wings to people?

**- Determined resolve**

And in this heartbroken, vulnerable presence among the people; Jesus had a fierce determination that no matter how much his heart broke, no matter how vulnerable it made him, no matter

how difficult was the work or how people responded to it, he was going to do whatever it took to see his heavenly father's mission of love to be completed; and he knew that the *only* way to fill his mission is to pray, and to risk, and to weep and work with arms open, heart exposed and vulnerable. Maybe this is part of what Jesus means when he says: If you want to be mine, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul? (Matthew 16:24b, 26)

## Prayer

Lord, teach us what are the sly foxes that threaten our lives. The way we use our time, the things at which we recreate, the way in which our lives are wasted away, the errant paths, the bad decisions, the things that rob us of a full life. Teach us what those are and help us to get back to your wings.

Teach us how we have become foxes, out of a genuine concern, or out of fear, or out of complicity with other powers, that we would warn you away from, keep you out of our life, or Go over there away from us and to those other people” So that by our example, we play a role in crucifying you and dividing or scattering your flock.

Instead, enable us to recognize and avoid the distractions and wanderings that endanger us, and pull us back to your protecting wings. Remind us, as you did in the garden of Gethsemane, that you would remove the sword from our hands; that our destiny is not to usher in your kingdom by force, but the battle is to usher it in as you did -- with our hearts open, and arms open wide, through deeds of love and mercy, gathering to you any who freely choose to respond to your love.

**Music** Temptation and sin continue to threaten to undo us. We must resolve to take up our cross and continue to die to that old life and let God continue to lead us away from that life and into a life of selfless love and mercy. Let's sing

### Lead On, O King Eternal

Words: Ernest W. Shurtleff, 1887    Music: Henry T. Smart, 1835

1. Lead on, O King eternal, the day of march has come;  
henceforth in fields of conquest thy tents shall be our home.  
Through days of preparation thy grace has made us strong;  
and now, O King eternal, we lift our battle song.

2. Lead on, O King eternal, till sin's fierce war shall cease,  
and holiness shall whisper the sweet amen of peace.  
For not with swords loud clashing, nor roll of stirring drums;  
with deeds of love and mercy the heavenly kingdom comes.

3. Lead on, O King eternal, we follow, not with fears,  
for gladness breaks like morning where'er thy face appears.  
Thy cross is lifted o'er us, we journey in its light;  
the crown awaits the conquest; lead on, O God of might.

### **Blessing**

Now as we prepare to live another week of Lent, may the Lord guide you and sweep you up into his wings -- that you may keep the course and fulfill your God-given purposes. Amen.

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