

SERMON

Pastor Cris Frigm

Come Rain or Shine

“I will keep on.”

That’s what I heard him say.

I will keep on

driving out demons

and healing people,

speaking the truth

and loving endlessly,

searching for the lost sheep

and crying for the brokenhearted,

feeding the hungry

and welcoming the outcast.

“I will keep on.”

That’s what he said, right

after he said my name, right

after he called me beloved, right

after he welcomed me home

and saved me a seat.

And I knew,

there was no stopping him.

I was under his wing.

Come rain or come shine,

today and tomorrow,

this love keeps on

This is your periodic reminder that the gospel is political. The good news of God, the story of God’s love at work in the world stands simultaneously within and against the systems of this world. We cannot take this good news and use it to wall ourselves away from the rest of the world and pretend that we are **living out** what God has done for us. God’s love, God’s grace, God’s promise compels us to respond.

In just a few verses, Jesus speaks to our work in the world. It’s not easy to hold it all together. There’s a lot happening and imagery is thrown around that may or may not have any connection to our lives today. He references animals and an ancient city. He’s in conversation with a Jewish faction that we typically criticize and distance ourselves from. What does it mean for us? What do we do with it? Like JC, we keep on keeping on.

The Pharisees come to JC with a bit of advice. Some would question their motives. As I said, they are often cast in direct conflict with JC, but maybe we can give them the benefit of the doubt on this occasion. While they are by no means supportive of JC throughout his ministry, they also have no love for Herod and the empire. Their warning to JC may have been exactly what it appears to be – an expressed concern that JC is going to get himself killed.

Because that's what Herod does – he violently holds onto power at all costs. He killed John the Baptist to save face at a banquet. His father slaughtered untold numbers of male children in the hopes of protecting his reign. Whether acting as Rome's puppet, or simply as a despot in his own right, Herod is still a corrupt dictator. While the Pharisees motivations and actions may be complex, Herod is unequivocally **not** a positive force in the ancient world. He represents the corruption of power and the work of evil.

And JC simply dismisses him. He's a "fox" – not the sly fox of modern fables. In the ancient world, calling someone a fox was naming them as either insignificant – unimportant – or destructive. Strong words by a Jewish teacher in those days. JC doesn't dismiss the threat but lays out his response to the threat. "I will keep doing exactly what God has sent me to do. Herod will not stop the power of God at work amid the corruption and destruction of this time."

Imagine the strength it takes to make that claim. Imagine the trust that undergirds such a promise to continue lifegiving and life affirming work knowing that the powers of the world are going to bring death in response. Imagine how hard it is to keep on keeping on when you're overcome with grief and know that you don't have as many resources as those who are working against you.

Maybe you don't have to imagine as we continue to work to bring love and grace to bear in our own communities, while others continue to accumulate power and wealth at the expense of those on the margins. Unfortunately, it's far too easy to imagine the feeling of being overwhelmed by the forces denying God's love.

And that's where the other animal analogy comes into the story. The mother hen that JC proclaims is the strength we need to continue doing God's work in the face of all we experience. I don't often think much about chickens, or of hens specifically – other than how I'm going to cook them.

Like so many scriptural images, the complexity of the modern world and our distance from agricultural life dulls the power of the analogy just a bit. But there's no missing the point that JC is making: the mother hen is the hero of this story. The mother

hen, the one who gathers the young ones under her wings is the ultimate power of God at work in the face of the world's power.

And that's not the kind of power we typically celebrate. We create superheroes who use their power as an overwhelming force to obliterate the evil of the world. We love stories where the forces of good build themselves up, despite the obstacles, and defeat the bad guys, as spectacularly as possible.

But God's love in this story is the ultimate defensive action. Gathering the chicks under the wing to restore life. Standing between precious life and the power of evil. I may not have much experience with chickens, but I've seen footage of the heroic love of birds to protect their young. I just recently saw the webcam footage of a bald eagle protecting her young chicks in a violent blizzard. Nothing short of death will stop a mother hen from protecting her young.

That's the promise that God makes to us. Well, God goes even further to say that nothing – not **even** death will stop God from loving us and protecting us under her wings. JC tells Herod to pound sand because he knows that he's doing the work that God has sent him to do. He knows that the power of Herod is insignificant compared to power of God's love.

The absurdity of saying a hen's wing is more powerful than a fox is the absurdity of God's power. That's what the Herods of this world can't understand. So they'll keep trying to twist the world to their view. They'll keep trying to bully their way into eternity.

And we'll keep showing up with the power of love and grace to deny them and prove that the God we worship is the answer to this world's evil. The mother hen is the power of God. Under her wing we find refuge. Under her wing, we find the power to keep on keeping on. Amen.