

The artwork on bulletin is from the 16<sup>th</sup> century

***Cock, Hen and Chickens Surprised by a Fox*** by Jean-Baptiste Oudry

It's doubtful that the artist used today's gospel reading as inspiration...  
But there is something there...

When Pharisees warned Jesus...

***King Herod wants to kill you!***

In that mysteriously strange moment... Jesus said

***Go and tell the one who threatens...***

***threatens like a fox threatens the chicken coop...***

***or a coyote the rabbit hutch and the quail covey...***

***go and tell the fox that I will not flee like a frightened rabbit!***

***Tell the threatening fox...***

***the one he thinks is a vulnerable, pregnant quail...***

***is casting out demons.***

***Tell him the one he thinks is a tasty little bunny...***

***is casting out demons!***

***Tell the fox that...***

***rather than hovering and quivering beneath the shelter of the palms...***

***The one whom he threatens... is curing the world today...***

***and tomorrow... and the next day.***

***And tell the fox that one day...***

***the third day... the work will be finished... all will be cured...***

***the fox will be chased away forever! Go! Tell that fox!***

I saw kind of fear and fury... on that bright orange rooster...

And it reminded me of Jesus...

And the blazing red eyes of the fox... devious... violent...  
But also... hesitant... cautious...

King Herod was *terrified* that Jesus will knock him off his throne.  
End of his reign... his power...  
Even though... Herod *is* the fox in the hen house

But then, in the middle of this dark and foreboding passage...  
there is a paradigm shift that we cannot overlook...  
No longer the aggressive rooster in the painting...  
Jesus changes roles... to the mother hen...  
protecting her frightened chicks... under her wings...

Not the strong, manly Good Shepherd guarding his flock...  
but a nurturing, feminine image that's just as loving... but *very* different.

And I see *that* Jesus... in the painting also...  
Protecting the weak... the vulnerable... the small...

I'm told... When a chicken hawk targets a mother hen  
She will squawk wildly... to protect her young... beneath her wings  
Protects them with her own body...  
When the chicken hawk dives, she will turn her body toward the attacker  
Never leaving her chicks.  
When the predator returns... she spreads her wings wider and wider  
She is too big a target...  
The chicks are safe...  
The hawk flies away...  
Searching for easier prey...

But sometimes... the hen faces greater threats...  
Sometimes the trouble is too much for the hen...

A hen house... that caught fire... and burned to the ground.  
 When the fire was out... they sorted through the wreckage...  
 and found one hen... near the door of the hen house.  
 Her feathers were singed brown from the fire... her neck limp...  
 When they picked up the dead hen...  
 her baby four chicks scurried out...  
 from beneath her burnt body.  
***They survived... because she gave her life... to protect them...***

Barbara Brown Taylor wrote...  
 If you have ever loved someone... and couldn't protect them...  
 then you understand the depth of Jesus's lament

***All you can do... is open your arms.***  
 You can't make anyone walk into them.

Meanwhile... this is the most vulnerable posture in the world  
 wings spread... breast exposed...

but if you mean what you say... then this is how you stand.  
***This... is how you stand.***

Given the number of animals available...  
 It's curious that Jesus chose a hen.

Where is the biblical precedent for that?  
 What about the mighty eagle of Exodus,  
 or Hosea's stealthy leopard?  
 What about the proud lion of Judah,  
 mowing down his enemies with a roar?  
 Compared to any of those,  
 a mother hen doesn't inspire much confidence.

No wonder some of the chicks decided to go with the fox.

But *a hen* is what Jesus chose...  
Which... if you think about it... is pretty typical of him.

He's always turning things upside down,  
so that children and peasants wind up on top  
while kings and scholars land on the bottom.

He's always wrecking our expectations  
of how things should turn out...  
giving prizes to losers...  
paying the last first.

So... *of course* he chooses a chicken for his image  
...about as far from a fox as you can get.

That way... the options become crystal clear:  
You can live by licking your chops  
or you can die protecting the chicks.  
Jesus won't be king of the jungle in this or any other story.

What he *will* be.... is a *mother hen*...  
who stands between the chicks  
and those who mean to do them harm.

no fangs, no claws, no rippling muscles.  
Just willingness to shield her babies with her own body.

If the fox wants them... he will have to kill *her*... first.  
Which he did... as it turned out.

He slides up on her one night in the yard  
while all the babies are asleep.

When her cry wakens them.... they scatter.

She dies the next day  
where both foxes and chickens can see her

wings spread, breast exposed  
without a single chick beneath her feathers.  
It breaks her heart,  
but it does not change a thing.

If you mean what you say,  
then this is how you stand...  
offering yourself

That... is the image Jesus gives us...  
A God who provides extraordinary protection...

God calls us to the safety of the nest,  
beneath downy wings,  
where a vulnerable heart beats  
for us.

We're the baby chicks in this picture...  
Not the fox... not the cock... not the hen...

What an independent prideful lot we are...

But we don't have to remain so  
We *can* change  
We can *turn*... from self-pride... and self-confidence  
We can turn *to* God  
And step into the safety and protection of his grace

Every one of us...  
has a moment in our lives... when we did just that...

Despair was too great  
Nowhere else to turn  
And we gave it all up... to God  
And in that moment... with the fox right there...  
we knew... *All would be well...*

The extraordinary power of God  
Is not limited to ancient characters in the bible  
Not just a story in an old book  
Jesus is ready... willing... and available...  
To defend those who cannot defend themselves  
To protect... *us*.

So to Jesus... Loving... Protecting... Saving... Gracious God...  
We pray...  
Lead us not into temptation  
And deliver from evil  
And let thy kingdom come  
And thy will be done on earth  
As it is in heaven.

Amen.