

I heard someone quip the other day that their desire to be well-informed was distinctly at odds with their desire to be sane.<sup>1</sup> I'm in full agreement.

It's been hard to make sense of what we've been seeing in the news. I (for one) still feel weighed down by several years of pandemic, political strife, economic upheaval, and so many losses. It feels like I've been on a yoyo these last months as we've been emerging out of the Covid caves we built trying to avoid the viral invader, and now ~ *again* ~ too many innocent people are dying ... this time thanks to a non-viral invader. My heart is heavy; it all seems so *enormous*. Unwieldy. Too much.

As I doom-scrolled over last weekend, my listlessness morphed into blood-boiling outrage when I saw that the Russian Orthodox Church (the premier religious presence in Russia) couldn't/wouldn't take a stand in support of innocent Ukrainians. The very body who is there, long considered a reliable ally of the Kremlin, uniquely positioned to take a moral stand in Russia, who could raise their collective voice and be heard by the powers that be has chosen to be passive, quiet, mostly uninvolved.

And yet, my faith tells me that when you look for signs of hope, they'll be there. I still lean in on Mr. Rogers' advice to look for the helpers.

On Wednesday, I stumbled on a media release reporting that not all of the Russian Orthodox Church has chosen to remain silent. More than 300 leaders – the equivalent of priests and diocesan bishops in our Episcopal hierarchy – have signed a petition calling for reconciliation and an immediate ceasefire,<sup>2</sup> and boldly criticized the suppression of non-violent protests. Disappointingly, none of the metropolitans, or what we would consider the highest-ranking ecclesiastic leaders of the church, have signed their names to this petition.

An interesting note about the Russian Orthodox Church: their church year is just slightly different from ours ~ they are about two weeks ahead of us in their liturgical calendar. The Second Sunday of Lent for them was at the end of February ... what they celebrate as the Last Judgement Sunday. Last Sunday for

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<sup>1</sup> David Sipress, cartoonist for the New Yorker magazine

<sup>2</sup> [https://cruxnow.com/church-in-europe/2022/03/russian-orthodox-priests-call-for-immediate-end-to-war-in-ukraine?fbclid=IwAR1StNZ13dBVEwBC3gPFhZw00c4ZKFFkyeSyT6drpc9T7T\\_Jwx192PJm-Q](https://cruxnow.com/church-in-europe/2022/03/russian-orthodox-priests-call-for-immediate-end-to-war-in-ukraine?fbclid=IwAR1StNZ13dBVEwBC3gPFhZw00c4ZKFFkyeSyT6drpc9T7T_Jwx192PJm-Q)

them is the celebration of Forgiveness Sunday. The petition circulated among their clergy between these two holy days: Last Judgment and Forgiveness.

This is of note, because a reformation seems to be taking place within their body politic. These ‘lesser clerics’ have flat-out condemned their church leaders’ complicity and silence, and yet have kept the door open to forgiveness and restoration within their ranks should their leaders change course, step up and speak out.

I’m reminded of an event roughly 30 years earlier than the events in this morning’s Gospel: Herod the Great ordered that all male babies and toddlers be murdered in and around Bethlehem. We refer to this atrocity as ‘the slaughter of the innocents.’ And this Herod that Jesus calls a fox in our reading this morning, Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, is likewise on the prowl, thirsty for innocent blood. The Pharisees are well aware that Herod Antipas is out to get Jesus, and they warn him to hurry up and be on his way. Perhaps they feel an uncharacteristic surge of protectiveness and empathy for Jesus and his mission, but I think it’s more likely that they believe that chasing him off is an expedient way of washing their hands of Jesus ~ to make him stop preaching, stop healing, stop casting out the demons in their midst – and be a thorn in someone else’s side.

Jesus, however, sees through this pretext, well aware that foxes lurk about. He is wary, but not fearful. As Father Furman described for us last week, he knows who he is, and whose he is.

Who he is is not one to equivocate. He is a man on a mission. He faces the task at hand head on. He knows his job is to preach, teach, perform cures and cast out demons. He knows he is to be the bridge between our earthy life and God’s heavenly realm. As such, Jesus makes no compromises when it comes to love. He does not shy away from advocating for peace even when the stakes are high; he does not flinch as he sets his face toward Jerusalem, that city on a hill that martyrs those who preach peace and love and grace.

Why? Because Jesus knows something that this fox cannot comprehend, a truth that threatens Herod Antipas, and Pontius Pilate, and every other foxy-type that subjugates, marginalizes or oppresses another living soul: that the first shall be last and the last shall be first,<sup>3</sup> which by the way is what Jesus said just prior to the Pharisees’ suggestion to leave town.

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 13:30

The clerics' petition goes on to state that "no non-violent call for peace and an end to war should be forcibly suppressed and considered as a violation of the law, for such is the divine commandment: 'Blessed are the peacemakers.'"

I love Jesus' mother hen analogy. A mother hen is ill-equipped to fend off a physical assault, yet the refuge she provides is life-saving. With this unexpected metaphor from Jesus about his desire to gather his brood under his wings and 'they were not willing,' the mighty appear in a new light: Herod, these plotting Pharisees, the power players in Jerusalem, all the firsts who would be first, then and now – they want to see themselves as masters of the universe, invulnerable and imperial behind their relentless, foxy maneuvering. Jesus calls their death-dealing by name, yet he also sees them as barnyard chicks lost in a storm, too afraid and too stubborn to seek shelter under the shadow of mother hen's wings. What these overlords want to be heard as a fearsome canine growl is perceived by Jesus as pitiable cheeping. The judgment that will yet fall on them, if they do not change their ways, will be the judgment of their own self-destruction.<sup>4</sup>

A new study was released earlier this month called *Jesus in America*. It found that most Americans perceive Christians as not necessarily practicing what Jesus taught.<sup>5</sup>

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry spoke to our diocesan clergy about this a few weeks ago. He said that we Christians, with respect to any number of atrocious and abusive practices in the past have got some history. We need to own that, very often, we have been silent in the midst of unspeakable horrors when we should have spoken up. Non-Christians see a contradiction between Jesus (and what Jesus was about) and what many of his followers are about. Bishop Curry said it's the job of the Church today to close that gap.

He said it will take a new Reformation, one that includes not only "re-presenting" a Christianity that looks more like Jesus to the rest of the world, but also doing a better job of modeling our own everyday behavior around Jesus' teachings and way of life.

Which means we have a lot of work to do.

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Rodney Clapp in *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, vol 2, pg 72.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/jesus-in-america/?fbclid=IwAR3D0Grvgt512Ae6pans8BX90wT36MWsWp0KrLCoPImNOd-ql11UkJQK47c>

As baptized Christians, each one of us is necessary to the work and ministry of the Body of Christ. Whether we align ourselves with the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement, the Baptist branch, the Roman Catholic branch, the Russian Orthodox branch, or any other branch ... all of us bear the responsibility to represent Jesus in the world. We must step up and speak out when people are suffering. When those who are beloved of God are in danger, fear or any kind of trouble, we are to be the heart and hands and mind of Christ, tending to their needs and easing their hurts. We are to be a people of both conviction and compassion. Of both humility and Truth-telling. Of both acceptance and discernment. Turning a blind eye to suffering, hardship, coercion, or victimization in any of their many forms makes us just as accountable as those who inflict the harm.

We are to be the change we want to see in the world. Jesus embodied that change, and the Church and each of us as baptized Christians are to embody that change as well.

To bring this back full circle, I have found much hope these last few days in the images and stories of modern-day mother hens in war-torn Eastern Europe, those who tend to others' well-being before their own.

I've been blessed by images of baby strollers lining the train platforms in Poland for families fleeing Ukraine, and posters held by parents and their children offering refugees places to live in Berlin, the capital of a country near-and-dear to my heart that is still absorbing much of the weight of the refugee crisis several years ago. A classmate of mine wrote to me about how she and a group of her friends and colleagues have rented numerous weeks of AirBNBs in Kyiv and Kharkiv to get money directly into the hands of families trying to flee. And I've read about some Canadian, Croatian, and American heroes who are choosing to enlist in the Ukrainian army. All of them mother hens. All of them, to one extent or another, risking their own comfort, security or illusion of safety, for that of another.

Like a mother hen who would sacrifice her own life for the sake of a bunch of renegade chicks, Jesus loves us even when we turn our backs on him; but I am grateful that Christ's embrace is wide enough to reach us despite how far we may wander.

Inspired by Jesus' love for each of us, may our hearts and spirits be re-formed into his likeness, that we may be emboldened to stand up, speak out and live what we profess.