

Text: [Luke 13:31-35](#)
Date: January 15, 2023
Title: “Hens and Chicks”: Fresh Start Series, Week 2
Theme: A fresh start requires vision, courage, and the knowledge that Christ keeps us under the protection of his wings.

1

I like numbers. I'm good with numbers.
So it probably doesn't surprise you that I've been doing my own taxes most of my adult life.

I worked with accountants for a couple years, but clergy taxes are weird – like specialist weird - and I noticed things they weren't doing quite right.

Then one year, there was a mistake, so I started doing it myself again.

It's a whole annual ritual.

I buy the software early, but I wait until March to start.

I spend hours compiling all the data into a spreadsheet whose format has been refined with each year's efforts...it's a thing of beauty

By the time I go to put the numbers in the software, I know them forwards and backwards.

But then something happens. Something *a/ways* happens.

I come across a situation that's new – the laws have changed.

The situation is a little different.

The program starts flashing red with big amounts owed.

And that's when I start to get a little grumpy about the process.

Ok, more than a little grumpy: stressed, confused, annoyed and angry.

Kate had a front-row seat to this ritual for the first time last year.

I did my taxes, then I did hers too.

She told me I shouldn't if it was going to stress me out.

I said it wouldn't.

I was wrong.

But by then, it was too late to go another direction.

And so, over the course of many hours, I wrestled the numbers into submission.

We had a conversation – ok, it *might* have been an argument – sometime after they got filed

She said: “I think it’s probably worth a couple hundred bucks to have someone do this.”

And I said: “Why should we pay someone? I know how to do it.”

I stuck to my position and wanted to hold on to my ritual, because I’m cheap like that.

Well, a year has gone by. We’re married now.

The other day, Kate and I were talking about filing taxes.

I said, “I think I’d like to hire someone this year.”

And my darling wife, in the sweetest, the most nonchalant “I want to say I told you so but I’m not going to say I told you so” voice – replied:

“Oh yeah? And why is that, my dear?”

2

This series is about fresh starts

But genuine fresh starts are hard to come by

Because we all have **something** in us that resists change

Sometimes that resistance is awakened in others - in the form of people who try to sabotage our progress

Because they don’t like how OUR changes might affect them

Like when one partner in a marriage begins seeing a counselor and the dynamics of the relationship shift as a result

But more often than not, the biggest source of resistance is us

We have a hard time being able to envision ourselves in that new way

I mean, I have a hard time picturing myself paying someone to do my taxes

And often, changes that touch on our religious and spiritual life are the most difficult of all

But once we decide to undertake them, they’re often the most rewarding

There’s a story that’s told often around here

About a time when our church was outgrowing its home on Branch Street in Medford village – in the late 60s, early 70s

Everything imaginable had been tried in order to create more room

The church had gone so far as to move the parsonage off the property to a lot down the street
That opened up space for a new education building

Still, it wasn't enough
There was no parking
The church was hemmed in by two streets and the cemetery

Meanwhile, there was land available out here, on Hartford Road
“Who wants to go to church out **there** though?” People asked.
At the time, Himmelein might not even have been paved yet

The decision to move split the church
Some people decided that the change wasn't for them

Obviously, looking back it's easy to see which side got it “right” – in other words,
was willing to make the strategic decision, a “fresh start” for the long-term future of the ministry
But some folks just never got there

3

We know the Pharisees in the Bible mainly as Jesus' opponents
People critical of Jesus and his ministry

Here, though, we see that not all of the Pharisees thought that way
Some considered themselves Jesus' allies
And even warned him, as he was doing a preaching tour, that Herod was looking for him,
That Herod wanted to kill him as he'd killed Jesus' predecessor, John the Baptist

The Pharisees were careful preservers of Jewish religious tradition
They were scholars of the law who wanted to understand its implications for daily life
And when you are a student of tradition, it's only logical that you'd be resistant to the kinds of changes Jesus was promising to bring
But clearly, based on this passage, there were some who were ready to see and do a new thing

Jesus' response to the suggestion that he should get out of town suggests one thing that's required in the face of resistance to change:

Courage

"You go tell that fox..." he begins

He's suggesting that Herod thinks he's clever

Because, isn't that how foxes operate? They're stealthy, smart, patient

You forget they're around, until you come out to the henhouse and all you find is a bunch of feathers

Herod knows how to use his power – by intrigue and trickery – to get the outcome he desires

These friendly Pharisees are trying to help even the odds

Jesus will have none of it

He won't back down

He won't run

He has a mission that matters to him, and to God

And he has a vision for how that mission should be carried out

He must go to Jerusalem and preach there

Either he will be accepted or he won't – but there's no way this is going to end outside the holy city

It must have been surprising to the Pharisees to hear Jesus call Herod a fox with such boldness,

But then in the next breath to paint himself as a mother hen guarding her chicks

It's a surprising metaphor

Because we already know what foxes do to chickens

It tells us, though, what matters to Jesus – not power, not even his own survival –

but care and connection, because that's how Jesus does protection

4

What I hear from Jesus in this passage are three things needed for change

Three elements we require for a fresh start

First, a clear vision for where he's headed – he's headed to Jerusalem,
even knowing what likely awaits him – and that's that
The second one we already mentioned.
Jesus speaks of the courage needed to get there – there's no way he's
going to run away from Herod
Those two seem obvious: vision and courage.
Any management book will tell you that, right?

But there's a third dimension here.
And we find it in what Jesus says about gathering Jerusalem under his
wings.

Most of us don't struggle with vision – we know what must be done
And courage – at least short term courage – is something most of us can
summon up when needed

What's harder though, is our ability to make either one of those stick
When we're meeting resistance
From ourselves or others

It's then that we'll need the promise that we're not alone
That someone has our back
That someone is behind us

This is the promise of faith
And that's what Jesus is offering
That even when the resistance comes from us
When we're the ones who don't want to walk forward toward the vision God
has for us
God doesn't abandon us, doesn't leave us, doesn't give up on us
But loves us through it all

5

You may be facing a difficult change
A decision that you've been putting off
A fresh start that you need to make
That's going to take work and effort and an ability to fight through
resistance

I bet its not the vision that's lacking
It's not the courage to start
It's the reassurance to keep going!

You need to know that God goes with you
Because your own resources are not going to be enough
They're never going to be enough -
Especially when you find yourself undermining yourself
Like we often do

I like this text for today because the coming year is going to be a lot of
change for us as a congregation
Adjusting to a new normal post-pandemic
Reconnecting with each other
Integrating new people and families into our community

Figuring out what we need to keep moving forward as Rachel moves into a
new appointment
What's working, what needs to work better
And honestly, what we'll have to let go

In the church, as in our own lives
It's not just about finding the vision
It's not just about summoning the courage to get started

It's about the faith to know that as we go, we are covered by the wings of
someone so much greater

I hope we'll remember this in those moments of fear
In those moments when we doubt the vision God has given us

And whatever fresh start you need to make, know that the Christ who
challenges you to move forward with courage to embrace the vision
Also offers you protection
A warm embrace
And encouragement
Even when you resist doing the new thing

(And I do promise we'll hire an accountant, honey.)

Amen.

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