My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Lord God of our Lenten Hearts, Minds, Spirits, and Souls, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

Our Bible is replete with references to farm life. Why do we think that is? (take all answers). God shows a love for creatures in God’s great creation. And who does not love a brood of baby chicks? Have you been to a feed store and seen them when they first get hatched? What do they do? Right, they huddle up for protection and warmth. So we can well imagine that before warming lights were invented, they huddled up under the mother’s wings. We know a lot about chickens, and not just from watching foghorn leghorn cartoons growing up. And here at CCCG, our neighbors have some we can see in action on most non-snow days. Yes, we know chickens.

But what about foxes, what do we know about them? We don’t really see them in Greenland all that often. We hear coyotes all the time in the suburbs. But not foxes. They don’t howl or bay, seemingly silent.

On the rare occasion we’ve have seen a fox, it’s usually trotting with purpose along the road or skirting the tree line of a meadow and forest, when it will suddenly stop.

And look. And while it’s surveying the landscape for bunnies or whatever it is that foxes feast upon, every once in a while it will make eye contact with us. But while chickens are cute and cuddly, we don’t quite know what to make of foxes. Are they cunning and clever? Or are they wily and not to be trusted? Maybe both.

It’s interesting in our scripture that Jesus does not denounce Herod. But he does describe him as a “fox”. And yet, just as Jesus has heard that the fox is hunting him and wants him to stop, Jesus seems unfazed. When powerful rulers used to getting their way want someone to stop doing stuff that makes them nervous, they pick them up and arrest them, as in when dissidents like Alexsandr Solzhenitsyn crossed Joseph Stalin and was shipped to a gulag. Herod, though, wants Jesus killed.

Jesus, however, says that there is yet work to be done. He is still in the countryside, going through various towns and spreading his message to the people. He knows that when he sets foot in Jerusalem he will end up just like John the Baptist, picked up and arrested at the very least for doing nothing more than preaching God’s truth rather than what the King has enlisted the priests and scribes to do—his bidding, not God’s healing.

Jesus is gathering his people outside the city walls, and longs to change Israel’s heart to understand that the powers and principalities want THEIR priorities blessed. We see this in all kinds of medieval art, don’t we? The priest is blessing the king, whatever he says, with a monk on either side, hand raised to heaven. But it’s at that point—where people of God do the bidding of their political leaders rather than God’s truth—that not only costs the Church its power, but misleads the people into political agendas over faithful practice and purpose.

Jesus preaches a truth of mercy, peace, compassion, and love. It drives out fear, and replaces it with hope, equality, and an equanimity that only God can give.

Jesus is saying that we, too, are chicks gathered under God’s protective wings. Sometimes we are sheep that need tending and guiding, too. But whether we are a brood of chicks or a flock of sheep, the metaphor for God’s people doing God’s will is one of defenseless ones who are in need of guidance at the very least.

How about it? Do we identify with the chickens here, can we resist leaders that want us to think of one another as people of some political or economic stripe rather than folks of compassion and prayer? We are bombarded like this daily. What should be messages of national unity—such as fighting a pandemic dread disease—or giving food, shelter, and comfort to those who have lost their livelihoods when the businesses they worked at closed their doors for good—get lost in the political fray of us versus them, weak versus strong, or greedy versus hard-working. Are we chickens who are hanging on by God’s gracious hand, or did we turn into foxes hunting down one another’s motives and method to say who is deserving of mercy or help and who is not?

Most of us don’t feel our life is in danger here in Greenland. We should be profoundly grateful for that. But we should not feel like there are foxes all around the edges of our lives, waiting to catch us unaware, ready to have us for dinner. We all make mistakes, and we need to have compassion to bring folks to God rather than berate them for an unkind word or act. The truth, as Jesus says, is that there’s lots of things that keep us from being healed and living fully, and most of it boils down to ***our*** fears being fulfilled. Fear is not a chicken thing; chickens trust their mother. Fear is a fox thing.

Foxes tell us we aren’t good enough. That’s fear. Foxes say that the farm is changing and that we don’t fit in or are not welcome. That’s fear. Foxes say that we don’t have enough to meet our needs and we don’t have enough. That’s fear. Foxes say that we didn’t make the right healthcare choices for ourselves or loved ones. That’s fear. Foxes prey on our insecurities. Insecurities say that our shortcomings and anxieties will leave us alone and un-loved. That is the opposite of the God of love, the God who gives us the bread and water of life.

Fear is very foxy for chickens. We see it in the distance, purposefully circling at the margins of our lives. Every once in a while we make eye contact, and that’s all it takes to bring havoc to the chicken brood. Foxes sometimes don’t even need to breach the coop or fence to cause havoc. The chickens squawk and get so worked up they fly away in every direction, away from the protective shelter of their mother hen. Uh-oh.

I’ll leave you with these final thoughts.

Last week we talked about the wilderness, and how going it alone is inconsistent with God’s community of love. Well, a chicken alone in the world will eventually succumb to the fox. So what do we do, particularly in this time of national crisis and conflict, when we are told that we should cling to only who is known to us, and looks like and acts like us?

Jesus gives us a path. He doesn’t hide, though he knows he will die. Tell the fox that we’re busy, bringing healing to the ones who need nurture. Tell the fox that we have better things to do than huddle in fear. We’re busy living God’s call, loving God under Jesus’ wings.

We do this not because we must, but because we choose. We choose to give, speak, and reveal life-giving words and deeds and will stare that fox straight in the eye as it flees into the wood.

Thanks be to God, Amen.