

As I have been watching what is happening in Ukraine, my heart feels ripped apart. Watching such massive suffering, misery and grief ruthlessly and needlessly imposed upon the people of that country, is heart wrenching. The Ukrainian people are so **vulnerable** as Russian forces invade and destroy their lives. However, in that vulnerability, they are showing exemplary courage. Their example reminds me of the words of social scientist, and research professor, Brene Brown, when she writes, “Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage. Truth and courage aren’t always comfortable, but they’re never weakness.” What the Ukrainians are experiencing is horrific and, as they **vulnerably** defend their nation while professing the truth of their identity and the fact that they want to be a democracy, they are showing remarkable courage and strength.

Vulnerability, truth, and courage are characteristics we find in our readings for today. In fact, we discover these are facets of God’s very being. Today, we are given deeper insight into a God who so deeply loves this world that God intentionally makes God’s very self **vulnerable**.

In our first reading, Abram is afraid that he will die without an heir. God has promised him a multitude of descendants as well as ownership of

an extensive amount of land. However, Abram is getting old, and he has not yet received these things. It is as though he has reached an impasse. No child has been born from his marriage to Sarah, and he has not received the land that was promised. So, God establishes a covenant with Abram by using an ancient covenantal rite or ritual that seems very bizarre to us. God instructs Abram to gather these animals, kill them and cut them in half. The severed animals represented the penalty if one party broke the covenant. The people who walked between the torn bodies of the animals assumed the penalty of the covenant saying, "If I do not keep the covenant, may I end up as these animals are now." As we read about this event and look at what happens, the smoking fire pot and flaming torch represent God. And, since the smoking fire pot and flaming torch are the only ones to pass between the animal pieces, God **alone** assumed the **penalty** for breaking the covenant. God **alone** walked between the torn animal bodies. God made God's very self so **vulnerable** that God put God's own reputation on the line. If God could not deliver on these promises, God was not worthy of Abram's trust. This ceremony was an iron-clad guarantee for Abram; he **would** receive descendants and land!

When we read about the history of the people of Israel, we know that God who loves this world so deeply and made God's self so vulnerable in this covenantal promise kept that promise. And, we are descendants of that same promise.

In our gospel reading from Luke, we see Jesus as a **vulnerable**, prophetic leader who shows us that true leadership means showing **vulnerability**. Today, Jesus shows **truth** and **courage** as he allows himself to be **vulnerable**, and he is anything but weak.

In today's reading, we find some of the Pharisees coming to Jesus to warn him about King Herod. They tell Jesus, "You better get out of here. Run for your life! Herod's on the hunt. He wants to kill you." Upon hearing this, Jesus is not at all phased. He tells the Pharisees, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet, today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.'"

Now, it is important to note that Herod was not a nice man or a benevolent king. In fact, most historians depict Herod as a paranoid, ruthless madman, maybe not unlike Vladimir Putin. He brutally wielded his political power. He had executed one of his ten wives, two of his sons,

numerous others, and he had John the Baptist beheaded on a dare. Herod was a hard-nosed, unjust, ruthless, callous leader. When Jesus enters the scene, Jesus provokes the status quo by addressing the **injustice** that was present in the culture and social constructs of the day. Like the prophets before him, those poets of social justice, Jesus speaks out for all who have no voice. So, after hearing this warning from the Pharisees, Jesus then intentionally proceeds to Jerusalem, that seat of political power, and speaks out for the powerless. He heals the sick, attempts to protect the weak, he feeds the poor, frees people from bondage, and welcomes **all**. By doing this, he riles those who hold political power, including Herod, and it is an understatement to say the powerful were antagonistic toward Jesus.

Jesus knows the stakes are very high, he knows he will die, but he continues to live into God's call and, by doing this, allows himself to become **vulnerable**. And, then he astonishingly and remarkably **laments** the very ones who will reject him and are not willing to be gathered to him. He sees the role of God as one of a **vulnerable mother hen**, one who wishes to gather her brood under her protective wings, safe from the ravages of the foxes of life.

Now, I have received some secondhand knowledge about foxes and hens. If you are at all familiar with what happens when a fox gets into a hen

house, you know that most of the time the mother hen herds her chicks under her wings for protection and bares her breast so that the fox must kill her first before it can get to her chicks. This is the **only** defense she has. After the attack, there will be a flutter of feathers with motherless chicks running around but at least they are alive, though their mother may be dead. When this happens, the chicks are given the chance to live. This is the image Jesus chooses to identify with, that of a tender, vulnerable mother hen attempting to protect her brood against a vicious and well-armed predator. Such **vulnerability** to proclaim and live the **truth** of God's **love** for us takes enormous **courage**, as Brene Brown suggests. **This is what Jesus lived.**

The season of Lent is a time of repentance, a time to turn around and turn back to the vulnerable God who loves us. It is a time to consider what it means to open ourselves to this **vulnerable** God who loves us unconditionally. And, the more we encounter this vulnerable God, the more we understand the **strength** of our own **vulnerability**. Vulnerability is not easy because we like to control.

When speaking about vulnerability, Richard Rohr writes:

We like to control. God, it seems, loves vulnerability... What we call "vulnerability" might just be the key to ongoing growth. In my experience, healthily vulnerable people use every occasion to expand, change, and grow... Yet it is a risky position to live

undefended in a kind of constant openness to the other – because it means others could sometimes actually wound us. Indeed, [the word ‘vulnerable’] comes from the Latin word “to wound.” But only if we take this risk, do we also allow the opposite possibility: the “other” [whom we encounter] might also gift us, free us, and even love us.

Our Lenten wilderness experience is a time to let go of our need to control, and to be reminded of who we are and whose we are. Lent is a time to become more vulnerable, to become more genuine and open-hearted; and vulnerable to the pain and suffering of those in our world. Lent is a time to be reminded that **we** are the chicks who are taken under the wing of a vulnerable God, the God who became vulnerable for the sake of this entire world. As Paul writes in Philippians, our God is **not** the belly of desire. No, our God is the loving, vulnerable mother hen who lays down God’s very life for us. To be vulnerable is a very courageous thing! After all, have we not come to know God best through the manger and the cross?