**Luke 13: 31-end**  At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, ‘Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.’  He said to them, ‘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 away from Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!  See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say: Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

***From the Diocese of Chelmsford: On behalf of the Church of England here in East London and Essex we offer our deepest condolences to our Muslim sisters & brothers after the horrendous events in New Zealand. We are devastated by this evil act, and offer those grieving and injured our love and prayers.***

***Via an American Episcopal priest who is a close friend of mine: Sending love to all our brothers and sisters who worship the Divine in Mosques. Nothing is more horrendous than killing children in schools and people in worship. Both strike at the most tender and vulnerable place of our being - that holy of holy place that connects us all to each other and to creation. We cry and grieve with you Muslim friends, and we stand with you.***

I have two things to say this morning – (apart from, through gritted teeth, well done to both Scotland and Wales) – and they both begin with P. One is Pharisees and the other is Prophets.

I have had a number of conversations recently with people who ask: what sort of church is St Peter’s? By which they mean: can you categorise St Peter’s Church as evangelical or Anglo-Catholic, or whereabouts in between is it? And I try very hard not to answer, because what mattered to me three years ago when I accepted the kind offer to come and be priest in charge in this place was not: where on the very broad spectrum of Anglicanism does St Peter’s sit, but: do the people who are St Peter’s church worship, in whatever tradition they do, with integrity?

I can say with a degree of certainty: this is my personal theology, or: the style of worship here covers (whatever whatever), but the only other thing I can say with confidence is: there are people at St Peter’s who come from an evangelical tradition, but who seem to be comfortable in this place, and there are people from a strongly Anglo-Catholic tradition who seem to be comfortable in this place, and there are people from other traditions and from none, who also seem to be comfortable in this place. We are a microcosm of the Church of England, representing a wide range of different views, but we live with those differences and, if anything, should air them and explore them more than we do, the better to understand each other.

It is hard to tie down any group of people, so when we hear in the gospel reading that: Some Pharisees came and said to him: Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you, we are a bit surprised. We all thought the Pharisees were the baddies, didn’t we. We tend to simplify them as such. But then we remember Nicodemus, the faithful Pharisee who came to Jesus three times in John’s gospel, going so far as to help Joseph of Arimathea to prepare Jesus' body for burial. And the Apostle Paul, who completely turned away from his life as a Pharisee to follow Jesus, even unto death.

On the one hand, you have these two, Nicodemus and Paul; on the other, you have those Pharisees who conspired to have Jesus killed; and in the middle, maybe, you have this group who didn't want Herod to kill him, but weren't ready to leave everything and follow him either.

For a long time, the nation of Israel was properly different; they literally built a wall between themselves and the outside world. A part of that wall was uncovered just a couple of years ago by archaeologists in Jerusalem - part of a wall built by King Solomon, who also built the Temple, the Temple that was rebuilt by the Herod whose son is here plotting to kill Jesus. But he wasn't able to rebuild the wall, so Herod, rather than fight the Romans who were occupying his kingdom, succumbed to them and became their puppet: he kept his title but relinquished all his power; kept the Temple intact while ensuring that the priests prayed for the Emperor; held tight to the law and culture with one hand while adopting the ways of the Romans with the other.

I think this is something we tend to believe is possible, that we can be simultaneously Christian and secular; that we can follow our faith without being too odd; that we can be a follower of Jesus without losing our place, metaphorically speaking, in Herod's court. This is where the prophet bit starts to creep in.

And Jesus seems to understand this foot in each camp mentality. He grasps that, though these Pharisees are close enough to Herod to know that he is plotting to kill Jesus, they are not so close that they aren’t prepared to tip him off. But they couldn’t up-sticks and follow him because they had their standing in the community to protect, families to feed, a puppet king to keep happy. They valued their lives.

So much for Pharisees. Heading towards the prophets now. I quote: Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often I have desired to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

There are two kinds of leaders: foxes and mother hens. Some leaders are predators, out to take advantage of those under their care. Leaders like Herod. And Jesus compares the people to chicks, and Herod to a fox. Foxes see chicks as lunch; they are there only to be used and abused. But Jesus refuses to let Herod’s threats divert him from what he has to do; he is the anti-Herod, if you like. The prophet of prophets.

He actually says he’s like a mother hen; he’s the other sort of leader. A mother hen doesn’t take advantage of her chicks and doesn’t need power over anyone, and Jesus is saddened that the people of Jerusalem would not let him be their mother.

People can’t imagine a world not dominated by foxes, and think that the chicken sort of power is ineffective, but not so. … It is different and radical. Writers about this passage often point out that actually it’s not normal behaviour for hens to gather chicks under their wings. I have no experience, but I am told that the exception to that rule is the farmyard fire. When the mother hen tucks the chicks under her wings, she is prepared to die to keep them alive. I don’t need to make the connection any more obvious than that.

Like the Pharisees before us, we navigate through competing worlds. Prophets are not characters left behind in the Old Testament, nor yet characters who belong safely in the New Testament alongside Jesus. Prophets are people who teach others; who **forth tell** the Word of God. And teaching happens everywhere. Prophets are counter-cultural, and live boldly, telling it how it is.

Today is the second Sunday in Lent. We are on a journey through this season; a journey in which we try to live differently; we mark these 40 days with acts that can change our lives for the better. Perhaps through them we can claim our own prophetic voice. For most of us, going to church, being part of a Christian community, sounds sort of OK; but taking that identity out into the world, being a prophet in the other spheres of our lives, is not easy for us to do.

That said, as Christians we have a prophetic voice to share with the world; and God is calling us to make that voice heard. No act of love is too small. No witness of hope is too small. And God knows: in a world where large-scale acts of atrocity are committed indiscriminately against men, women and children, our prayers and our small acts become ever more important.

I talked last week about Sir Moses Montefiore, who said we are worth only what we are willing to share with others. A friend of mine sometimes quotes a prayer from her childhood that says something quite similar:

What we keep, we lose, and only what we give remains our own.

We have been given unique gifts from God, gifts to share with the world. Do not let any of your gifts go to waste. You do have a prophetic voice, and maybe now is the time when the world is ready to listen.

**Amen**