

NO FAUX PAS
Sermon, March 13, 2022
Texts: Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 13:31-35

As just explained to the children, a “faux pas” (pronounced “fō-pä; the “x” and “s” are silent) is an idiom used to describe a socially awkward or tactless act, especially one that violates accepted social norms, standard customs, or the rules of etiquette. (*You might say it's a faux pas to pronounce this French term as “fox paws.”*) Synonyms include “gaffe, (social) blunder, indiscretion.” The expression comes from French, where it literally means “false (faux) step (pas)”, or “miss-step”.

Speaking of “fox paws,” I told the children how in 2001 my mother had something of a literal and figurative fox PAUSE. She had an encounter with a fox that gave her p-a-u-s-e. She was preparing to feed the birds one morning, as she would do every morning (*my parents have a semi-wooded acre in the back of their home; my mom later took to feeding the birds AND the deer; she had to stop three summers ago because it was discovered she was not only attracting many deer, which was fine, she was also apparently attracting hordes of rats who came mostly by night, which wasn't fine ... it eventually necessitated an exterminating service coming to the home!*). This particular morning in 2001 she stopped short when she looked out the window and saw a fox in the yard. The fox was by a tree, sitting and apparently ready to pounce on the first bird that would show up. She was fascinated by the fox, but hesitant to go out and do what she normally did each morning because it was there. She also didn't want to scare it away quite yet, as she wanted my father to see it.

However, Dad didn't respond when she excitedly called upstairs to him; she figured he was still sleeping. As I remember the story, she slowly opened the door to go out, and the fox wouldn't move so she retreated back into the house. That fox was giving her pause, keeping her from doing her usual good deed, her morning routine of feeding the birds! Meanwhile, my father was upstairs, quietly stifling a fit of laughter ... for, unbeknownst to my mother, the fox was a ceramic figurine he had purchased the day before and placed in the yard! Fear of a “faux fox” kept Mom from doing the good she routinely did; and all the while, this fox certainly was nothing to be afraid of.

It's a bit of a silly analogy, but that little escapade of my parents came immediately to my pun-inclined mind twelve years ago when this particular lectionary Gospel reading came up in the lectionary cycle, so I thought I'd share it again. Some friendly Pharisees had come to Jesus to warn of King Herod's designs on His life. Remember, this was the same King Herod who was responsible for the arrest and the eventual beheading of John the Baptist. John had been jailed because he openly criticized Herod for divorcing his wife and marrying his brother's divorced wife. So, this was Herod's way of dealing with opposition that threatened his status quo: Just shut the opposition up ... something dictatorial government officials are prone to do. So, when the Pharisees warned Jesus, Jesus replied. *“Oh. Yikes. Well, if the political climate is that oppositional right now, perhaps I'd better come back later.”*

No, that's not what He said. Jesus would **not** be discouraged and/or deterred from doing what He had come to Jerusalem to do. He replies, *“Go tell that fox Herod ...”* In that agrarian society, foxes were just considered troublesome pests to the crops and livestock ... sly, clever, cunning and conniving pests, but pests all the same. Jesus continued with an unswerving resolve in so many words, *“I must keep going today and tomorrow, and the next day. I must be on my way, and this fox will not give me pause, he will not deter or discourage me.”* There will be no “fox pause,” no missteps, no faux pas because of this royal “fox” ... Jesus will continue on His determined path.

In the greater scheme of things, Herod may be king, but Jesus is the KING of kings. King Herod the Fox will not intimidate King of Kings Jesus the Savior from doing what He had come to do, what God had called Him to do. Fox fear may have kept my mother from doing the good she routinely did; but that would not happen here. That royal “fox” will not give Jesus “pause;” Jesus will not be discouraged from carrying out the will of God. He will keep the divine vision, the divine focus, and do what it takes to secure redemption for His people. Jesus is journeying closer to Jerusalem, and He knows, closer to His death. He WILL travel to Jerusalem and meet head on the

traumatic tradition of this city that kills the prophets and stones those whom God sends. Again, Jesus would not allow any fear of that fox King Herod to cause Him to commit a false step, a faux pas, a deviation from this loving path He was determined to follow in order to carry out the will of God. In short, it is the divine Plan that He will indeed "give it up" in order that we might "get it all."

In like manner, anything or anyone who would deter or discourage us from doing what we know is right and good, from doing what we believe to be the will of God in our lives, from doing what we know is the loving thing to do, that person or thing is little more than a distraction, a destructive pest, and should be treated accordingly! Imagine Jesus saying, "A 'pox' on that fox and on any other pesky discouragements. I intend to continue to fulfill what My Father has called me to do, I intend to carry out what I understand to be God's will, I will see this through, come what may." He had a driving sense of divine purpose and right-ness about what He was doing, and it kept Him going.

This is the same determined Jesus who "took hold" of Paul as we read this morning in the second lectionary text of the day from Philippians 3; listen again to Paul's words: "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. -- Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." You may know Paul wrote those words from prison; in fact, he spent the last five years or so of his life in prison. Roughly 25% of the book of Acts is devoted to the imprisonment of the apostle Paul, as if to imply that approximately twenty-five percent of the time followers of Jesus just may be led by the Spirit to places they'd rather not go, or be led to associate with people they'd just as soon avoid ... largely because these are also places and people that the Savior loves. We may think at times we are in the wrong place, but even the wrong place can be the right place, if we are faithful to Jesus Christ, who is every place. Wherever we are of use to Him; that's the right place for us to be.

You may remember the 10-90 principle: 10% of life is made up of what happens to us. 90% of life is affected by how we react to that 10%. We really have no control over 10% of what happens to us. But we do have a measure of control over how we will respond, and how we respond can have a profound effect over everything else that follows. Having been here a quarter century, I know many of you sitting here this morning who have had to deal with difficult and discouraging issues of health, loss, family troubles and/or other setbacks in that 10% of life over which no one has control. Your faithful presence here each Sunday morning is silent testimony to the strength of your character and the fact that you have chosen to try and respond **well**, by the grace of God. You might think a driven, Type-A personality like Paul would have gone crazy having to spend so much time in prison. But it was during this time he wrote his epistles to the Philippians, Ephesians, and Colossians, each written with some of his most tender words. There is just no trace of discouragement, resentment, bitterness, anger, or faith-less cynicism in these inspiring and uplifting epistles written during his imprisonment, these letters that continue to bless us to this day. Again, we may think at times that we are in the wrong place, but even the wrong place can be the right place, if we are faithful to Jesus Christ, Who is every place. Don't be discouraged ... where ever we are of use to God; that is the right place for us to be.

Paul continues: "Join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have (seen) in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame." One final thought: there's a whole sermon itself in that last sentence "Their destiny is destruction" As Elbert Hubbard once wrote, "Men are not punished for their sins, but by them." What theology may call punishment, nature calls consequences. God's ways are good ways; going against them has grave and often destructive consequences. "... their God is their belly..." Paraphrased: These are people who live to serve their appetites. They are driven, even controlled, by their bodily desires, and the often sad result is that they glory in their shame, they revel in what is actually shameful, even pitiable. Paul concludes, "Their mind is set on earthly things **But our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself. Therefore ... stand firm in the Lord, my beloved!"**

And do not let any "faux foxes" deter you from doing so.