

“God’s Love is Like a Mother Hen’s”
Luke 13:31-35
Sunday, February 21, 2016
The Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas, preaching

Scripture. Prayer.

Opening.

Lent is a good time to remember just how high and deep and wide God’s great love is for you. Lent is a season in which, for 40 days, Christians give special attention to going deeper in their spiritual lives. In this way, we prepare ourselves for the remembrance of Jesus’ last supper on Holy Thursday, his death on Good Friday, and his glorious resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Today’s sermon is about how God’s love is like that of a mother hen.

How many of you raise chickens? Raise your hands. How many folks here this morning have chickens living on your property? [pause.] How many of you love chickens, or go to visit chickens at someone else’s house? [pause.] How many of you love Kentucky Fried Chicken? [pause to encourage chicken farmers & chicken lovers to raise their hands.]

OK, good. So, when I talk about chickens this morning, if I say something incorrect, you can go to these folks who are knowledgeable about chickens and get the real story.

I don’t know much about chickens. But I do know a few chicken stories. God’s love is like a mother hen: who gathers and protects us.

I. God’s love is like a mother hen: who gathers and protects us.

“Have you ever seen a chicken hawk go after its prey? The old mother hen is often aware of the presence of the hawk in time to gather her chicks under her wing. With a furious fuss she squawks till her brood is safe by her side. She fluffs out her wings and protects them with her own body. The chicken hawk dives and the old hen turns her body toward him and cocks a wary eye without moving from her children. The predator comes in again for the kill and the mother

spreads her wings even wider. A third time he dives only to be thwarted by the determined self-sacrifice of the mother hen. She is too big to be a target and the chicks are too safe to be seized so he flies away.” (Brett Blair).

Jesus despises that Roman collaborator, Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great. The Herodians are hated by many Jews of the time. Jesus refuses to preach and teach in the two cities most associated with Antipas: Sepphoris was his father, Herod’s first capital; Tiberias was built by Antipas to replace Sepphoris.

As the mother hen protects her brood from the chicken hawk, so Jesus longs to protect Jerusalem and the Jewish people from Herod the fox. Jesus uses the term “fox” as an expletive when referring to Herod. In the Jewish context of Jesus’ day, the fox is associated with treachery and destruction, according to some scholars. Others suggest that Jesus is mocking Herod. Herod calls himself a “lion;” Jesus cuts him down to size. He is “a fox, the son of a fox, a small-fry,” (Randall Buth).

While Herod and his supporters want to lead the people into a new world with Rome at its center, Jesus calls the people to repentance and faith. Luke’s gospel, in particular, sets up Herod as a prime enemy of Jesus -- one who plots Jesus’ execution on the cross.

Jesus is victorious over all our enemies. Like a mother hen, Jesus gathers us together as the Church and protects us from the plots of the Evil One.

This is the image Jesus raises up as he laments over Jerusalem: “...as a hen gathers her brood under her wings,” so Jesus longs to gather and protect us from the onslaughts of the world – a world that tries to draw us away from our faith...that tries to draw us away from God...that tries to draw us away from the community of the Church.

Jesus gathers his people together and protects them from the ravages of sin and death.

God's love is like a mother hen: who gathers and protects us.

Martin Luther, in his Large Catechism, summarizes God's gathering, protecting love in this way:

“There is on earth a little holy flock or community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith. I was brought to it by the Holy Spirit and incorporated into it through the fact that I have heard and still hear God's Word. In this Christian church we have the forgiveness of sins, which is granted through the holy sacraments and...the Gospel.”

The Church is the greatest contemporary expression of God's gathering, protecting love. Through the Church, God gathers the faithful together and protects them from the undermining discouragements of the secular world.

God's love is like a mother hen who gathers & protects us.

God's love is also like a mother hen: who hides us under her wings.

II. God's love is like a mother hen: who hides us under her wings.

Listen to the titles of these great hymns that were sung during the time of Jesus in the synagogues and Temple worship in Jerusalem:

“Hide me in the shadow of thy wings,” 17:8.

“In the shadow of thy wings I will take refuge till the storms of destruction pass by,” 57:1.

“Oh to be safe under the shelter of thy wings,” 61:4.

“In the shadow of thy wings I sing for joy,” 63:7.

“Under his wings you will find refuge,” 91:4.

These songs are found in the Psalms, the hymnbook of the people of Israel.

Psalms 17, 36, 57, 61, 63, and 91 all refer to the protective wings of God. So when Jesus

uses the image of a mother hen gathering her brood under her wings, the people are familiar with it.

In Luke 13:34 it says that Jerusalem was “not willing” to receive Jesus’ offer of love, protection and comfort.

How often do we refuse Jesus’ love? How often do we reject the shelter of God’s wings, soldiering on under our own power and wisdom; ignoring the help that God in Christ Jesus can provide...the help that God freely offers throughout history, from the beginning of time, and throughout eternity beyond the end of time...the help that God offers most fully in the life, death and resurrection of his son, Jesus Christ?

The sheltering wings of God, of Yahweh, are often lifted up in the songs of Israel, in the Psalms.

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus offers his comfort, like a mother hen – sheltering wings for a frightened people.

Jesus is God. Luke is clear about this. Jesus is clear about this.

Jesus laments Jerusalem’s unwillingness to accept His shelter, His comfort, His servant-king, self-sacrifice for their sakes.

God’s love is like a mother hen who gathers & protects us.

God’s love is like a mother hen who hides us under her wings.

God’s love is also like a mother hen: who dies for us.

III. God’s love is like a mother hen: who dies for us.

Glen E. Ludwig tells this story. It’s not about a mother hen; it’s about a mother duck:

“This past summer, there was a young mother mallard who had her brood. And it was interesting to watch how she took care of all seven of them. When anyone approached the lake,

she became immediately aware and would gather her little brood together and hustle them along to hide in the reeds and brush that surrounded the edge of the lake. Once, someone went really close to get a better look, and she flew away. [It was surprising at first] -- a mother abandoning her young. But then it became obvious what she was up to: She was offering herself as a decoy. She wanted the intruders to notice and follow her, away from her ducklings. She was willing to sacrifice herself in order to protect her offspring.

“Now maybe we can understand the lament and the passion in Jesus' own voice. It is the cry of a mother who is worried to death about not only Jerusalem, but about all of us. Like a mother, Jesus sees far more clearly than do we, the children, the danger we are in. Like a mother, Jesus knows we tend to over-estimate our powers and are prone to go off on our own, leaving the protective wings, to seek our own excitement and adventure. And like a mother, Jesus chases after us.

“Do you see the image? Like a mother, Jesus' love is so great that his all-consuming passion is to sweep us up into his protective arms. And although there are others in pursuit of him, namely Herod, Jesus, like a mother is persistent. He sticks to what his love compels him to do. He pursues his flock with a passion. His answer to Herod shows that: He has a little work to do in Galilee yet, a few chicks to sweep beneath his wings; and then, he is headed to Jerusalem, where he will, in essence, fly off from his chicks alone and draw God's judgment to him so that the jaws of death might sink their teeth into his flesh only, and not into his children whom he loves with a mother-hen's protective passion.”

God's love, as shown most fully in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, is like a mother hen: who dies for our sakes.

Closing.

It has been said that Jesus' outstretched arms on the cross begin to resemble the loving wings of a mother hen, if we look long enough. It doesn't make sense, this sacrificial protecting of her young. This is a love that is wrenchingly painful to observe. It is all the more painful because that love is rejected and despised by so many of the very children to whom it is offered.

One of our most difficult spiritual challenges is to truly believe and accept and feel and claim and live out of the great love God has for us. It is a love that gathers us into the Church; it is a love that offers spiritual protection through our participation in the family of the church. It is a love that shelters us under the wings of a powerful God who is Creator of the universe. We are protected and empowered by His Holy Spirit.

It is a love that lives among us in the flesh, that teaches us and that models the servant-king life for us. It is a love that dies for us all, and is raised again, victorious over sin and death.

Today's gospel reading reminds us that God loves us like a mother hen. Jesus, knowing that Herod lurks in the shadows, has no concern for himself; his concern is for you and for me, for all of us. His concern is for his children and for his purpose. He goes to Jerusalem, prepared to die for us.

This is the message of Lent: Jesus is God; Jesus loves you and me more than we can ever fully comprehend.

May you reflect on God's love for you, and may you receive it in your heart, during this holy season of Lent.

Amen.