

Lent 2C 2019, Luke 13:31-35, March 17, 2019, Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Lancaster, PA, Kurt S. Strause

Can you hear the mother's cry of lament? "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing?" Jesus cries these words over Jerusalem. Beloved Jerusalem. Where it all began for Jesus. You recall old Zachariah, ministering in the great Temple in the city's heart, to whom the angel announced his son would become the forerunner of the Messiah. Jerusalem, where Jesus was brought to the Temple only eight days old for the appointed sacrifice to be offered. Jerusalem, where Jesus only 12 years old, taught men three, four times his age in the ways of Torah. Jerusalem, home of prophet and king, Temple and priest.

Jesus laments over Jerusalem with the cry of unrequited love. His cry flows from the very heart of God. God laments children who scatter about, going their own way, refusing to find shelter under the loving protection of God's own wings. They are like baby chicks, playing out in the yard, seeking their own path, believing the mother's love to be oppressive, suffocating, an obstacle to their personal fulfillment.

Standing on a hill overlooking the ancient city of Jerusalem stands a church called *Dominus Flevit*. The name means "The Lord Wept." It's built on the traditional site of Jesus' cry of love for his beloved city and those who live there. Inside the church, on the altar a mosaic depicts Jesus' words which never happened. The white hen spreads her wings, her head crowned with a red comb and a golden halo. Under her wings are her pale yellow baby chicks. The chicks look happy and content. The hen ready to spit fire at any who would threaten her family. Circling the scene are the words of Jesus, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing." The last words circle under the chick's feet, in a pool of red. And you were not willing. (*told by Barbara Brown Taylor*)

Jesus focuses on Jerusalem; there he must go. Luke, our gospel writer, makes it apparent from the very beginning that Jerusalem will be the place where everything comes to a dramatic conclusion. Luke mentions the city of Jerusalem 90 times in his gospel. The entire rest of the New Testament; gospels, epistles, the Revelation, only 49 times. Here, in this ancient city, with its Temple as the very throne of God, Jesus must come. The Temple, where sacrifices were offered to God; animals and grain and oil. Sacrifices of thanksgiving, dedication, and, most importantly, sacrifices to atone for sin. The blood of animals sprinkled on the people in a yearly ritual to forgive all sins. His destiny is his destination. Jesus comes to understand his mission as one with the great prophetic tradition of the Old Testament. Prophets are called by God to speak the Lord's judgment.

Jerusalem is often the place they go, and Jerusalem is where they most often met their death at the hands of those God tries to reach.

With an unrelenting and persistent love Jesus goes to his destination. He will not be deterred, not even by the one he calls “that fox,” Herod. His mission is a three-day mission; casting out demons, curing the sick. “Today, tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.” The words clearly allude to what will take place within the great city. Three day’s work, from a Friday to a Sunday, from cross to empty tomb. To Jerusalem he must go. His love for his children compels him to go.

All takes place in Jerusalem, but Jesus’ love for his children knows no city boundaries, no geographical limitations or barriers of language, culture or country. The sad and painful truth is that we are often like those chicks, running about, busy in the farmyard, oblivious to the cry of our mother hen. She cries out for us because she sees the danger lurking in the shadows, the foxes and predators who seek to separate us from the protective care of the parent’s love. Our love is a willful love, a love of self, born of a desire to go our own way, to live independently and stubbornly on our own terms. Like many small children we don’t like to be told how to live, what to do, obey the will of the parent. We scurry about our business refusing to listen to the cry of our mother hen calling us back to her protective wings, always believing we know better.

Picture the scene in your mind. The mother hen, her wings spread wide, chest exposed, vulnerable to the threats and dangers of the world. She has little defense against predator; no talons, no fangs to fight off the enemy. All she has is a willingness to stand in the way and shield her babies with her own body.

Does the image remind you of anything? Does the picture of one standing, with arms outstretched, chest and body exposed to the talons and spears of predators call another picture to mind?

Jesus is on a journey. He goes to that place to call his children under the protection of his outstretched arms. He goes to confront all the forces of fox and lion, sin and death. The sheltering wings of the mother hen are the arms nailed to a cross, the body exposed to scourge and spear. It is the price of a willing and persistent love.

This love still calls us. This love calls us to come to the very place where arms always remain outstretched ready to embrace us. Where a vulnerable mother hen willingly sacrifices herself for her brood. Where a savior died on a cross. Under his arms we find our final shelter and our home. Amen.