

Under the Wings of A Mother Hen

Luke 13:31-35

Sermon Notes from the pulpit of First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois
Second Sunday of Lent, March 13th, 2022
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Luke 13:34-35 34 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! 35 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."

Jerusalem is the Chicago of Jesus' world, the City of Broad Shoulders, the Big Onion, the Jewel of the Midwest—and the streets around the temple might be likened to The Miracle Mile. Jesus is heading there, making his way to Jerusalem, O Jerusalem.

Some Pharisees warn Jesus to "get out of the way," change your plans, make a U-turn. "Herod wants to kill you."

But Jesus will not be swayed. He's got his sights set on the City of David. He has a plan, a purpose, and the cross-hairs of his divine intention are aimed at Jerusalem. Neither religious nor civil authorities will weaken his drive.

When Jesus looks to Jerusalem, he sees a melting pot where the hurting, the forgotten, the disadvantaged languish. He sees the cast-out and cast-off. He sees those hungering and thirsting for righteousness. He sees the dispossessed and the over-run. He sees the invaded Ukrainians. He sees the columns of Russian soldiers just following orders; and Jesus sees the lines on the face of the mad man making those orders. Jesus sees all creation gathered in Jerusalem.

He even sees us.

Jerusalem is the metropolis of God's people. Some then and now consider Jerusalem to be the very *navel* of the world. (An Omphalos is a religious stone. And the foundation stone at the peak of the Temple Mount is considered by some Jewish sources to be the place from which the creation of the world began. Jesus's tomb is located in Jerusalem, so Christians often mark it as the place of the founding of the New Covenant. Muslims hold the Dome of the Rock as essential and sacred to faith and history.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem," Jesus cries. "How often did I want to gather your children together just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you would not have it!"

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Note that Jesus doesn't compare himself to an eagle. That's the bird of Herod, of might, of beauty and of strength, the bird of *empire*, a bird of dread and might. Jesus compares himself, instead, to a mother bird. A hen.

Two of my sons are South Carolina "gamecocks," and hens, I learned, can be ferocious creatures. Gamers often attach spurs to their legs above their already-sharp claws and fight them. This blood sport is not legal in this country. And I don't think that this ideal of a "hen" is what Jesus is getting at—no offense to the University of South Carolina.

A hen is a common bird, a bird from which even children pluck eggs for breakfast, an ordinary, serviceable, trusted, known creature.

Jesus wants to protect and love the world, as a hen protects her gathered brood under her wings. But they will not have of it. The people of Jerusalem (of the world?) will welcome Jesus on Palm Sunday with shouts of *Hosanna*; and by Thursday their voices will rise up in unison, "Crucify him."

Jesus comes with love, and we send him away in shame.

Nevertheless, in Luke's gospel, Jesus is intent on going to Jerusalem. It is at the very heart of Jesus' call "to raise up the beaten down, to bring those of the extremities of the social order close to the heart of God" (p. 71, *Feasting on the Word*, Yr C, Vol 2). Jesus is going to Jerusalem no matter what. Nothing will stop him.

Jesus' intention is to heal the world with the love of God. That is why his young, pregnant mother sang whole-heartedly a song of revolution. That is why Jesus will tell the story of a father who welcomes home the no-good, prodigal son. This is why Jesus turns the world upside down with the story of a lowly Samaritan saving the day. Jesus will encourage even the thief dying next to him on the cross. The wayward and the lost are Jesus's friends. He's come to say to them, "You are not alone. My name is Emmanuel. God-with-us."

Nothing will stop Jesus from calling-out and and bringing-in. And he'll go to the thick of things in Jerusalem to share this love, to plant these seeds, which, by the grace of God, will grow and grow. Nothing will stop Jesus. He makes his way to Jerusalem, to the heart of the city, to the heat things. And if we dare to allow it, he will enter even our hearts, welcome even us into his protective embrace, equip us to be disciples in a world filled with violence and hurt, and go out with us as we go out in his name to serve.

On the outskirts of Jerusalem, this misunderstood Christ stands hurting, banished, heavy-hearted, filled with love for those who will not/cannot let him in.

No matter the danger, Jesus continues his faithful ministry, keeping a close eye on Jerusalem—weeping for Jerusalem, oh Jerusalem. He is weeping for us, too, waiting for us, praying for us, calling us. Calling us to follow.

Calling. Calling.