

Lent 2 C 2010

Texts: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Psalm 27

Philippians 3: 17-4:1

Luke 13:31-35

“O 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!” Luke 13: 34

One of the problems of our modern urban living is that it has taken us away from the land and as a result, taken us away from a larger understanding of life other than our own. We no longer grow our own food, kill and butcher our own meat (with the exception of those who hunt) or get to watch the interactions of other animals living together. Living in the suburbs has made us nature poor.

I was reading an article a few weeks ago in a gardening magazine that said that more and more subdivisions are banning vegetable gardening or if they are allowed, they must be hidden from sight. We want nice manicured lawns, and only flowers, please.

This is so different than just a generation ago. My mother was raised for a time on a farm. At that time you could rent land and farm it or be the caretaker for someone else. It was one way to feed a large family. When I was a little girl, I remember my mother telling me the story of her brothers being told to go out and catch a hen for dinner. They were to capture it, give it to their father who would place it on the chopping block and chop off its head.

Now came the part that was really gross but would put me into gales of little girl laughter; my mother would tell me about how the chicken would run around without its head until it fell over. I could just picture this happening. What a funny, gross sight that must have been.

She would also tell me about going into the hen house and gathering eggs for breakfast and how the chicks would run around the hen house and pen peeping all the way. In the evening all these little chicks would get together with their brothers and sisters and settle down with their mother. The mother hen would spread her wings and the chicks would

huddle under them, not just for warmth, but also for protection. When the mother hen had all her chicks gathered she would put down her wings and you never would know that they were there. They became invisible.

Every once in a while a fox would get into the hen house and would wreak havoc. Sometimes by the time my grandfather would get to the henhouse, it was too late. All that was left was blood and feathers...and amazingly, the chicks.

Barbara Brown Taylor, the noted Episcopal preacher and author writes, “with nothing much in the way of a beak and nothing at all in the way of talons the mother hen hopes that she can satisfy the fox’s appetite so that he leaves her babies alone.”¹ The only thing the mother hen has to offer in order to save her chicks is herself and so she puts herself between the fox and her chicks.

In today’s gospel reading we hear some of the most tender words Jesus ever speaks. They are words filled with love and compassion and they are words that are breaking his heart.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stone 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!”

Jerusalem is very significant to Luke. He mentions it 90 times in his gospel where the other three gospels combined mention it 49 times. Jerusalem, that city on the hill where the all important Temple was, where God resided and presided over his people. Barbara Brown Taylor writes: “When Jerusalem obeys God, the world spins peacefully on its axis. When Jerusalem ignores God, the whole planet wobbles.”²

You would have thought Jerusalem got the message. You would think that after Jerusalem was sacked and the Temple burned by the Babylonians hundreds of years before Jesus that the people would have

¹ Barbara Brown Taylor in *Bread of Angels*

² Barbara Brown Taylor *As a Hen Gathers Her Brood*, *Christian Century*, 2/25/86 p. 201

learned, but they didn't. Israel kept making the same mistake over and over and over again.

And now Jesus is on his way to the city that has killed those sent to it. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem; he is on his way to die. Jesus knows his destiny. Jesus knows that no power in the world can distract him, no puny tetrarch by the name of Herod Antipas can prevent him from carrying out God's plan.

Jesus knows that he will be offering himself in exchange for God's people, for everyone, and so he puts himself in between us and the Herod's of the world.

These words of Jesus are heartbreaking and heartbreakingly familiar. He is in pain over Jerusalem's refusal to take his offer of safety. He is lamenting over the stubbornness, hard heartedness and short sightedness of the people. It is that stubbornness, hard heartedness and short sightedness that will ultimately cause their demise. This is the pain that stirs Jesus to say these words.

Surely we can understand his pain. Anyone who has wanted to protect a family member and couldn't, anyone who sees a beloved friend going down a path where the only destination is destruction, anyone who loves and it is not reciprocated, anyone who holds out hope to another and is refused...surely, surely we do understand Jesus' anguish over Jerusalem.

The alternative is so clear, so compelling. What would it take for Jerusalem to learn? What would it take for Jesus to be able to gather God's children? What will it take for us to learn to open ourselves to the loving embrace of Jesus?

What it will ultimately take is the death of Jesus. What it takes is that simple barnyard hen putting herself between sin and the ones she loves. What it takes is the One offering himself on behalf of the others.

We are in the season of Lent; that wonderful season where we are asked to think about where we have strayed from the safety and love that protects us. We are invited to enter more fully the shelter of God's love and care.

God can only open those wings of love and invite us back in. We have to make the choice as to whether we stay out in the barnyard exposed and vulnerable to the sin of the world, or do we go back for more nurture and love so that when the time comes we are ready to face down those larger entities that seek to destroy God's children, to put ourselves on the front lines for those most vulnerable?

The question for Jerusalem, the question for us, the question for Lent is whether or not we are willing to do so.