

“Gathering the Brood”

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Luke 13.31-35

John 18.25-27

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As you probably know by now, we’re exploring various Lenten symbols during these forty days. We have discussed ashes, torn fabric, bread, and donkeys. Today our symbol is the hen and her baby chicks.

Our scripture passage in Luke is about the hen gathering her chicks. Jesus is going to Jerusalem and is beginning his final journey into Jerusalem before his death. Of course, no one knows this is his farewell tour and he tries to tell them over and over that he will die and be raised again. Perhaps because of grief, perhaps because no one wants to lose this dear friend and miracle worker, and perhaps because human brains cannot conceive of it, the disciples refuse to comprehend this loss.

The Pharisees, a group of religious leaders at the time, approach Jesus with this warning about Herod. Sometimes the Pharisees challenged Jesus but it appears that they are helping in this moment with a warning. Were they being helpful because they recognized the danger, or were they part of Herod’s plot? It is important to note who Herod was, as there were many Herods throughout Jesus’ lifetime. This specific one is Herod the Great’s Son, Herod Antipas.¹ Regardless of which Herod we were talking about, though, you can nearly assume a Herod in the Bible during Jesus’ time was up to no good. They were power hungry rulers who sought to kill Jesus.

There are many people who might like to say that Jesus wasn’t political, but I always argue that he was incredibly political - if you disagree, I welcome that conversation. I like to always remind you that sermons are conversations, not creeds you must agree to - I’m here to engage and inform and begin the conversation.

Jesus was political because he spoke out against tyrants and corrupt government leaders. It was not that he was partisan, but that when he saw a ruler or leader or person with power who was harming a group of people, he spoke out against them. I think if Jesus were alive today he would speak out against Vladimir Putin and the ways in which he has directed an army to create mass murder of a people, harming innocent Ukrainians. I bring up Jesus’ opposition to corrupt

¹ Leslie J. Hoppe, “Luke 13.31-35” in *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Vol. 2*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 69.

political leaders because the Herods of Jesus' time were corrupt. Herod Antipas created two capital cities: Tiberias and Sepphoris. Perhaps as a protest, as a means of standing for his principals, Jesus never visited these cities.² Jesus was intentional in his ministry. He knew where the power was and he knew how to disrupt that power to create a more equitable society.

Jesus calls this Herod a fox! We often think of foxes as cunning, and perhaps Herod was cunning, but in this time it looked toward destruction.³ When Jesus calls him a fox he is pointing to the absolute destruction created by Herod's reign. Every leader makes mistakes that the next one must deal with and change course in some way, but sometimes the destructive leadership of one person can leave the world in absolute chaos. History repeats itself when we don't learn it, and when we don't make changes to previous issues in our world.

Jesus tells the people that it will be completed in three days. This alludes to his death and resurrection, though he isn't as direct about it here as he is in other scripture passages. According to the author of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus sees that his death is coming, and even when he recognizes this inevitability, he keeps working toward change. We might wonder what keeps him going - how he is motivated if he knows his death is imminent. Maybe he could see the fuller picture of resurrection. Knowing he was fully human and fully God he was able to recognize that death would not have the final say. In our world it seems some days that we are moving two steps forward and one step back - but we are a people of the resurrection. Even when we cannot see the resurrection, even when we feel that we are stuck in a Lenten desert or wilderness, we have that hope of God within us. We have the visual that Jesus describes.

Jesus talks about a hen bringing in her chicks under the wing. Jesus doesn't say "I will bring you under my wing," but, "how I long for this." This is a desire of God - stating that Jesus really wants to gather all of God's people under her wing - but we all keep running around like baby chicks, scattered and fighting over a worm or a pellet of food, or some other reason. This is God's longing for us. This is a reminder that even when it feels like the world is falling apart, God is there - waiting in the wings, waiting with wings, wanting to gather us together. God is still with us and God laments that she cannot bring us together. Those wings are always there, waiting.

The feminine imagery here is not just of God - Jesus says, "I am like a mother hen." This is a reminder that compassion and love are not "feminine" versions of love. Caring and nurturing are not just for mothers. We all have that capacity, and Jesus has that capacity, as well.

I also included a scripture passage that is used closer to Good Friday. This is the part where Peter denies Jesus three times, and the cock crows. Here, the sound of the rooster is a

² Hoppe, 69.

³ Hoppe, 71.

fulfillment of the prophecy Jesus stated. Jesus told Peter that he would deny him, and Peter, the people pleaser, denied the denial. Yet, when Jesus was arrested, Peter, like most humans, and like the other disciples, was confused. What was he to do next without his friend and leader and confidant by his side? As he wanders the town, searching for answers, people recognize him and ask him if he knows Jesus. Peter denies this knowledge, and after the third time the rooster crows. The sound of this bird is the reminder of denial, the reminder that God wants to welcome us back into her wings, but too often we're the ones pushing God away.

In what ways do we push God away? How do we push away other members of the brood? What would it be like for all of us to be under God's wing, and what will it take to find our way back?

Know that wherever you are in your journey, God's warm wing is outstretched. Perhaps you are feeling a bit lost and wandering, seeking that wing. Perhaps you are in a time of comfort and have found that wing temporarily, waiting for the rest of us to find our way. Know that God is there - God has not left - and we are not alone. Thanks be to God. Amen.