

Sermon for Lent 2c
March 13, 2022
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church
Los Alamos, New Mexico
The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney

Genesis 15:1-12,17-18
Psalm 27
Philippians 3:17-4:1
Luke 13:31-35

“Some Pharisees came and said to Jesus, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.'”

Today’s Gospel brought to mind one of Aesop’s Fables. Aesop was a storyteller in ancient Greece around 600 BC, around the time of the Babylonian exile. The story goes like this.

Aesop’s Fable – The Rooster & the Fox*

One bright evening as the sun was sinking on a glorious world a wise old Rooster flew into a tree to roost. Before he composed himself to rest, he flapped his wings three times and crowed loudly. But just as he was about to put his head under his wing, his beady eyes caught a flash of red and a glimpse of a long, pointed nose, and there just below him stood Master Fox.

"Have you heard the wonderful news?" cried the Fox in a very joyful and excited manner.

"What news?" asked the Rooster very calmly. But he had a odd, fluttery feeling inside him, for, you know, he was very much afraid of the Fox.

"Your family and mine and all other animals have agreed to forget their differences and live in peace and friendship from now on forever. Just think of it! I simply cannot wait to embrace you! Do come down, dear friend, and let us celebrate the joyful event."

"How grand!" said the Rooster. "I certainly am delighted at the news." But he spoke in an absent way, and stretching up on tiptoes, seemed to be looking at something afar off.

"What is it you see?" asked the Fox a little anxiously.

"Why, it looks to me like a couple of Dogs coming this way. They must have heard the good news and—"

But the Fox did not wait to hear more. Off he started on a run.

"Wait," cried the Rooster. "Why do you run? The Dogs are friends of yours now!"

"Yes," answered the Fox. "But they might not have heard the news. Besides, I have a very important errand that I had almost forgotten about."

The Rooster smiled as he buried his head in his feathers and went to sleep, for he had succeeded in outwitting a very crafty enemy.

* * *

But trickery was not what Jesus was about. In response to the threat of King Herod, one might expect Jesus to counter with a more masculine metaphor.

In fact later in the Gospel of Luke [22:36-38] Jesus will advise those who do not have a sword to buy a sword, and the disciples will proclaim that they have two swords, and Jesus will tell them that's enough.

But here Jesus counters the threat from the nefarious King Herod with an image of himself as a mother hen protecting her young under the shelter of her wings.

"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!"

The feminine image seems most appropriate being that March is Women's History Month, and this past Tuesday was International Women's Day.

After all in the first creation story in Genesis,

"God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them."

Unfortunately we seem to forget that both males and females are created in the image of God. That's what makes the image of the protecting hen so poignant.

My mother grew up on a farm, and not far from the farmhouse was the chicken coop. Among her chores each morning was the collecting of the eggs from the nests.

That was fine and good most of the time. But then when some of the eggs were allowed to mature and hatch. Then everything changed.

When the chicks were about the mother hens would chase her and her sister away from their chicks, pecking at their legs as they ran.

She learned quickly that Mother Hens are nothing to be trifled with.

You who are parents know the truth: you will do anything possible to protect your children.

Truly, Truly: your children are always your children no matter their age or location.

Truly as well: your parents will always be your parents for as long as they live.

I remember the first time I'd left home after I enlisted in the Air Force. All I wanted was to get away from the town where we'd moved after my sophomore year in High School.

My father's job had taken us from a University community where intelligence was good to a Blue Collar town where intelligence was ridiculed. I hated it.

What I did not anticipate was the emotional impact of being away from my mother. Literally, I had not been away from my mother for more than a day since the time I'd been hospitalized with polio.

During those weeks she spent every moment she could at my bedside. In the subsequent years I'd refused to go away to Scout Camp or to spend nights away.

I was bound to my mother and going away to Basic Training proved to be almost more than I could bear.

Momma's Boy that I proved to be: I remember the heartache of missing her so much to the point that I broke the rules one day, walked to a phone booth on base to call her – just to hear her voice.

My mother's words were comforting and gave me the gumption to push through and cope with my homesickness.

Sometimes all we need is that soothing reassurance to get us through those terrible moments when we don't have the faith we need to face a given situation. A word of

love from a loved one, and sometimes a complete stranger, gives us just enough grit to get through it.

That's what draws me to this image of Jesus the Christ as a hen sheltering her chicks under her wings. There's a poignancy to feeling that comfort from God, or from those folks who God seems to send to us in our times of need.

We are living through difficult and trying times: The past two years with Covid, the past two weeks of watching the mighty attack the weak.

How we long for God's protecting wings for those we can only offer our prayers.

That's the importance of seeing Jesus standing with us. Jesus who suffered as our fellow humans suffer now.

I've heard described the way a hen will place herself between a predator and her chicks when attacked: choosing to give her own life so her chicks may live. It seems an apt image this Lenten season as we journey to Calvary.

Ash Wednesday reminded us each of just how vulnerable we are in our mortality. "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you will return."

We are like dust in the palm of a hand, only for a short puff of breath and we are gone.

As we walk these weeks of Lent let us remember this image of a hen sheltering us under her wing, and remember the sheltering shadow of Christ on the Cross.

Here we see Jesus choosing to share our lives, to share our vulnerability, to share our fear, to share our death, and to share our reliance on the God's promise of life anew.

This is the pinion, the wing of protection the Cross provides.

The third prayer of Mission in Morning Prayer says it all:

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name.

Amen.

* Adapted from the Library of Congress: <https://www.read.gov/aesop/001.html>