



Sunday March 13, 2022
Luke 13:31-35 (Second Sunday in Lent)

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Tony Acompanado

If I asked you to draw a picture of Jesus, what would the image look like? Would it be a blonde haired, blue-eyed shepherd holding a staff? What about a lion? Perhaps a loaf of bread and a cup of wine? Or, maybe a door, a gate, a light, or a bridegroom? But what about a mother hen? Would it ever have occurred to you to draw this seemingly insignificant, vulnerable, and defenseless little animal? Me neither.

They aren't the most elegant of creatures. They can't fly to save their lives, and they make the most ridiculous noises. They can be fierce when they want to be, but there's something pathetic about how defenseless and vulnerable they are.

And it's this image that I reflect on when I hear the words of Jesus in today's Gospel from Luke, "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, but you were not willing."

Can you picture what Jesus is describing? Our God, as a mother hen, much less one whose chicks reject her? And here's what I find so surprising about this image. If power, wisdom, or success were the characteristics Jesus wanted to emphasize in his choice of metaphor, he could have used any number of images to make his point. Instead, on this second Sunday in Lent, Luke invites us to contemplate Jesus as a mother hen standing with her wings wide open, offering welcome, belonging, and protection – while her children refuse to come home to her.

In the verses that precede this description, a group of Pharisees warn Jesus to leave the area where he's teaching and healing, because Herod wants to kill him. Jesus fully knows that Herod's irritation is nothing to mess with (after all, he is the one who ordered the arrest and beheading of John the Baptist), he nevertheless tells the Pharisees that he's not afraid of "that fox." I have work left to do, he tells them, and I won't be deterred by the threats of a bully.

At this point in the story, Jesus has set his course for Jerusalem, the city that rejects God's messengers and kills its prophets. Jesus knows exactly what fate awaits him there, but he won't change course. Not for Herod, not for anyone. Because although he knows the difficult and painful journey that lies ahead, he has ultimate confidence and trust in God's promise that something far greater awaits.

The life that God offers us is always coming to us in unknown, unexpected, and unplanned for ways. It's the promise that life is constantly breaking in on us in both big and small ways. And when it does, we can't explain how or why it happened, but we know that it did. And we know that it was real. In those moments we were open to the promise of the life to come.

That openness to life is the call of Jesus in each of our lives and what the gospel is about. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." It's why "he set his face to go to Jerusalem." It's why there are so many stories of Jesus healing the blind and the deaf. He's opening eyes and ears to the promise, to the future, to the coming of life but not just any ordinary life – abundant life. It's why, so many times, he tells us to stay awake, to be watchful, and to not fall asleep. He's telling us to keep open to our future, to our coming life. And that's what Jerusalem in today's gospel has failed to do.

Jerusalem has killed the prophets, the ones who were calling it into a future. It stoned those God sent to bring it life. Jerusalem here is a metaphor for the ways in which we are blind and deaf to the promise, the ways in which we do not keep open to our future. "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 says of Jerusalem. "And you were not willing!" Jerusalem has closed itself to the future. Jerusalem has closed itself to the promise and the insistence of life.

And sometimes you and I are Jerusalem. Sometimes we're blind and deaf to the promise, closed off to the abundant and life-giving future that awaits us. It happens when life is on autopilot and we're just going through the motions. It happens when we hold grudges and resentments, when we withhold forgiveness, or refuse to accept the forgiveness of another. It's in our suspicions, cynicism, and rejection of others. It's in all the things we declare as ultimate and in the ultimatums we issue. It's what's going on when we put up our defenses, draw lines in the sand, deny hospitality and refuse to welcome others, especially those who are different from us.

It happens when fear overwhelms us and power, security, and control become our primary values. It's what lies behind our illusions of self-sufficiency, our refusal to listen to another, and our belief that there is only one way – our way. It happens when structures, rules, and law become ends rather than means. It's what happens when we cling to and become defined by past guilts, hurts, or losses. It's what's going on when we refuse to be self-reflective,



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question ourselves, or consider something new. It's what happens when routines, habits, and the same old patterns rule our lives. It's our inability or refusal to imagine, to dream the impossible, to wonder what if, or say, "Perhaps..." It's what happens when we're too afraid to trust.

When this happens, we settle for simple life rather than the abundant life that Jesus promises. We stagnate. Everything deteriorates. We're no longer growing and maturing. Despair replaces hope and nightmares replace dreams. We can no longer see or hear the promise of new life. We close ourselves to our future, and where there is no hope for the future there is no life.

Jesus is not accusing Jerusalem. He is grieving Jerusalem. When he finally sees Jerusalem, Luke tells us, "He wept over it." He is sorrowing and protesting the end, the death, the narrowness, and the shortsightedness of Jerusalem. And yet, he continues coming to Jerusalem. He is always coming to the Jerusalem of our lives, always calling us to life, to abundant life, to new life. And this promise never goes away, even when we don't respond.

The gift of life is always coming to us, in countless different ways, every moment of every day. The promise remains. Life never gives up on us. Life will be waiting for us when we're ready and willing to be blessed.

So, in what ways are your eyes, ears, or heart closed today? What needs to happen, to change, to be let go of, for them to begin opening? What would it take for you to be open to and welcome an unknown promise, an unforeseeable future, an uncertain life?

I know it's asking a lot to risk this kind of vulnerability to such a blessing. That's not the way we usually live, but that's the point. This is our only chance for life, abundant life, a new life. And that's a risk I want to take, don't you? Jesus mocks Herod by calling him a fox, but he never argues that the fox isn't dangerous. He never promises his children immunity from harm. What Jesus offers is not the absence of danger, but the fullness of his unguarded, open-hearted, and completely vulnerable self in the face of all that threatens and scares us. What he gives is his own body – his own life. What he promises is a place of refuge and return for all his children – even the ones who choose to turn away from him and what he offers.

And it's this turning away that fuels Jesus' deep grieving. You don't have to be a parent to mourn missed opportunities, broken promises, or crushed hopes. All of us, regardless of our circumstances, know what it's like to feel rejected. We know what it looks like to fail in our best efforts to protect, help, advise, or save. We know the grief we experience when we watch someone we care about self-destruct before our eyes. All of us carry painful memories of unreturned love, unmet desires, and unfulfilled dreams. We know what it's like to long for something and find no satisfaction for that longing.

Jesus longs and grieves for his lost and wandering children. For the little ones who will not come home. For the city that will not welcome its savior. For the endangered masses who refuse to recognize the peril that awaits them.

"How often have I desired to gather you." It's a lament for all that could have been in this chaotic, clueless world. For the lasting wounds and the hopes that come to nothing. Sometimes, like Jesus the mother hen, we can't do what we most desire to do. We can't give what we deeply long to give. We can't save the loved ones we ache to save. "You were not willing," Jesus tells his wandering children. You would not come back. You would not relinquish your right to yourself – not even when your life depended on it.

What do you yearn for that escapes you? What missed chances, failed efforts, or broken dreams tug at your heart and call you into mourning? How might we grieve with Jesus over our homes, our cities, our countries, our planet? How might we stand with him in the Jerusalem's of our lives, and weep our sorrow into new hope?

My friends, I've got to be honest; trusting a God who's like a vulnerable mother hen feels like one of the riskiest things I can imagine doing. I'd prefer the lion. And yet a yearning mother hen is precisely the God we belong to. The One weeping for us. The One calling us home. The One whose wings are wide open, whose protection is sufficient, whose hospitality is limitless, whose body and heart on the line, and whose desire is fixed on us – all of us.

"How often have I desired to gather you." During this wilderness season of repentance and transformation, I pray that the longing of Jesus may become our longing, too. And may the way of the mother hen – the way of vulnerability, sorrow, hope, and eternal welcome – lead us back to the One who will never, ever stop calling us home. Thanks be to God. Amen.