

No Deeper Love
Luke 13:31-35
February 28, 2010

Have you ever watched a mother hen protect and care for her young? If she sees a hawk circling overhead, she instantly gives a warning sound, and immediately the baby chicks come running to hide beneath her wings. When menacing storm clouds fill the sky with rolling thunder and jagged lightening, she again makes a noise that beckons her brood to herself where they find protection from the elements. As night approaches and shadows lengthen, she gives a quiet call that gathers her young to rest.

Jesus speaks of his desire to be a “hen gathering her brood together under her wings.” Is this not a marvelous picture of God’s protecting care . . . of his love and concern and overarching protection? A mother hen can be fierce in the protection of her little chicks snuggling together under her wing. They try to slip out now and then and her wing scoops them back up into the safety of her shelter. They attempt to steal out from under her warmth only to find themselves gathered back into the protection of her body.

This is the picture of God that we all cherish . . . a protective, loving, warm, supportive, defending, supporting God – a mother hen who holds her chicks in a passionately sheltering sanctuary where the fox cannot penetrate. How fervently we all long for a place like that – a place where the terrors of life are held at bay and the miseries of life are subsumed in the warmth of a space of security. We retreat to that place in our faith time and time again, confident that God will be our shield and our fortress.

Why, then, do the chicks strive so hard to escape that place? Why must Jesus say, “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not willing!*” Why were they not willing? Why are we not willing? We are as much a mystery to ourselves as Jerusalem must have been to herself! Why is our trust in our Lord’s care for us so shallow? Why do we wander off into our own paths so readily, as though we can live life on our own terms . . . even when it seems likely that the fox will show up? At no place in life, perhaps, does our sin show up quite so boldly as the way we run from the shelter of God’s wings in order to live in the shadow of the fox! Our self-will, our falsely placed self-confidence betrays us all too frequently as we listen to the soft “purring” of the fox. We turn to the world around us for our security and contentment . . . as our source of comfort and consolation.

Jerusalem had a long history of this, and Jesus refers to it. Rather than listening to the prophets’ appeals to return to the protecting wings of her God, Jerusalem killed the prophets and stoned those whom God sent to her as his ambassadors. He gave his prophets a message that

essentially called Israel to return to her mother who would gladly spread her wings over the brood that she had seen into existence. As Jesus descends the Mount of Olives and looks across the valley toward Jerusalem...toward this city in which he would sacrifice himself...He calls to her people with tenderness and grace. He issues the call to turn toward the Father who is giving up his Son for their benefit.

The plea to return is regularly issued to us also. That is what the word “repent” is all about. Repentance is turning from our own self-sufficiency, our own self-will, our own misguided confidence in our ability. Too often we believe we can redeem our own lives...that we can re-order our own lives without any help from the Author of those lives.

Only a week and a half ago ashes were placed on our foreheads. The ashes reminded us that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. We also heard the call to “repent, and believe in the Good News of Jesus Christ.” In hearing that call, we are reminded again that it is our sinfulness that creates the gaping hole that separates us from our God. We are invited once again to return to our Lord in whom alone there is new life; through whom we have a promise of protection, support, and love that will see us through the days when the fox shadows our every footstep.

Hear the cry of Jesus spoken to us in today’s terms: O children of mine, children of mine, you who so love to go astray and flee from the protection of your mother’s wings, return to me.

If you have ever loved someone you could not protect, then you understand the depth of Jesus’ lament. All you can do is open your arms. You cannot make anyone walk into them. Meanwhile, this is the most vulnerable posture in the world – wings spread, breast exposed – but if you mean what you say, then this is how you stand.

This is how Jesus stands for you. I pray you will make the decision to come under the protection of the cross – not only for your eternal salvation, but also to gain life now that begins and ends in Him.