

Consider the Birds
Job 12:7-10
Luke 13:31-35
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Consider the birds. Pigeons, doves, ravens, condors, eagles, ostriches, pelicans, sparrows, owls, falcon, stork, herons and hawks. Of all the birds found in the Bible, Jesus chose to compare himself to just one: a chicken. A mother hen. Why not an eagle? These are majestic, powerful birds. Clearly an eagle is are most like God, than a chicken.

Consider the chicken. The chicken is the most domesticated of birds. Chickens live close to human beings. Those of you who grew up on farms know taking care of chickens isn't always pleasant. Cleaning their coops, collecting their eggs, watching how they sometimes peck each other to death. There's nothing much glamorous about chickens. Chickens teach about the power of life. In her book "Consider the Birds" Debbie Blue tells the story of a little girl named Beulah. Beulah's daddy held in his arms as they watched chickens being butchered: "The father whispers to her softly, secretly – so softly no one else can hear – he whispers 'Beulah, look. Just look at that bird. Even though he's dying, he can't help but dance. Don't cry, sweet pea. Just stay here and watch that bird dance."

So what was Jesus saying as he compared himself a mother hen? Listen again to Luke 13:34: "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!" Jesus is complaining. lamenting. He is in city where prophets are rejected. The prophet Isaiah had been rejected by Jerusalem. Isaiah had come to warn about what would happen if Jerusalem continued in their complacency. 'We don't need to worry about social justice because we are God's holy people. Nothing bad is going to happen to us; we have the temple; we have the LORD on our side.'" Jerusalem ignored what the prophet Isaiah said. A century later, Jeremiah came with a similar warning: if you King of Judah and you the people of Jerusalem don't stop oppressing the poor, you will be punished by God. Neither the king nor people wanted to hear such discouraging news, so they had Jeremiah thrown into a muddy cistern. Fast forward to a prophet named Jesus. Approaching Jerusalem in the final weeks of his life, Jesus sensed Jerusalem would ignore him too.

Yet knowing this did not stop Jesus. In response to the news that Herod wants him killed Jesus says '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. In effect, Jesus said 'even though there will be people and situations that try to stop me, I'll never stop doing my work.'

What was Jesus' work? Why did God send Jesus to the world? Our affirmation of faith today said when asked to say something definite, God got personal and sent us Jesus. "Jesus demonstrated that God is better than omnipotent, omniscient or any other high-sounding abstraction. God is love embodied: nonviolent, relentlessly seeking, convening, suffering love." God sent Jesus to show us what love looks like. God's love is relational. To make known God's passionate concern for the well being of all creation. God is merciful. God has compassion for us in our hurts, our sin. In Jesus, we see this love is like a mother hen. Two things that a mother hen does help us see the nature of Jesus' work on earth. The first is brooding.

When a mother bird broods, she sits on or incubates her eggs. To brood is to hover. To loom. Jesus knew about brooding. As a faithful Jew Jesus would have known Genesis 1:1-2. Here's how it reads in "the Message" translation. First this: God created the Heavens and Earth—all you see, all you don't see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss." God's spirit brooded..... What God's spirit was doing in creation is what mother hens do. They brood. Hover. Incubate life. They make life possible. God sent Jesus so God could hatch us. In Jesus God is Incubating us. Growing us. . So we could be born again – so we could have the life that truly leads to life so that we can become the people we were intended to be.

Mother hens brood. The second thing they do is gather their flock under their wings. Jesus wanted to gather the people of Jerusalem under his wings like a mother hen. His power was like that of a mother's. His was the power of love. The power to gather, to protect, love and save.

You could say Jesus' whole ministry was the work of gathering. Think of all the people Jesus gathered together. In Luke's gospel the smelly, poor, unclean shepherds were the first welcomed into Jesus' brood. They were the first to hear the news of his birth. Soon there were many others "on the fringe", many outcasts, many so-called undesirables who found a home with him: known sinners, the old, the lepers, the sick, the women, the children. At his last supper his betrayer is included in the guest list. From the cross, his love extends to those who had him killed. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." In the book of Acts (which continues the story of the gospel of Luke) this in-gathering takes on cosmic proportions. In Acts 1:8 before he ascends into heaven, the risen Christ tells the disciples "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The gathering of the whole world to himself is now the work of the disciples.... That work is being done by the whole church today, including by us.

It's not a noble thing to imagine God as being like a chicken. Maybe that's how God wanted to. That's what Debbie Blue says in her book. The incarnation is a troublesome idea; that God became a mammal. It's hard to some people to grasp. The religious authorities almost immediately wanted to kill the incarnate God. How could it be that this man – with whiskers, with filthy hands, maybe bad breath even

– be the Son of God? It's offensive really. Could it be that this is why God would allow himself to be compared to a chicken? To show that God in Jesus is domesticated? Brought down to earth? Precisely because God comes down to our level?

Jesus' power was the power of a mother hen: to gather together, to nurture, to protect, to save. Jesus knew his little ones would ignore him. This gave Jesus great pain. A mother's power is limited. She can't force her children to do what they should. A mother cannot protect her children from all the evils of the world. She cannot immunize them against suffering. If it were in her power, she would exchange the suffering of her children for her own suffering in a heartbeat. Isn't that what Christ did for us? Took the painful effects of our suffering from sin on himself in his death? Yet still Jesus' power was limited. There are some people who don't like to hear that God's power is limited. They'd rather think only of God's sovereignty, God's majesty. That kind of power the world also worships. And there is that side to God too – but that is not the side Jesus always revealed. Is this why the idea of God as mother perhaps may trouble us at some level? Is it because God as mother has limited power. God our mother shows us God's vulnerable side. This makes us face this side of ourselves too.

Good mothers want to gather their children, protect and love them, even in the face of being ignored or rejected. Sometimes we have ignored our mothers, just as Jerusalem ignored Jesus and the other prophets. In her poem "God Our Mother" Allison Woodward writes "To be a mother is to be accused of sentimentality one moment,/And injustice the next./ To be the Receiver of endless demands,/Absorber of perpetual complaints, Reckoner of bottomless needs.....To be a mother is to be the first voice listened to,/And the first disregarded....." We don't like to admit that we've ignored, disregarded, forgotten our mothers' words. We don't like to admit that we ignore or disregard God too. Yet, we can make different choices, starting today.

So, here's the good news. On this Mother's Day we honor Jesus our Mother hen. How exactly do we do that? Let's think about how we honor our mothers on Mother's Day. This week, Americans young and old have struggled: what shall I get my mother for mother's day? If your mother has passed away, today is a time to remember; a day to visit the cemetery if it's close by. For those whose mothers are still here, we been ask ourselves: this year will it be a card or flowers? Chocolates or jewelry? Brunch at a restaurant? Breakfast in bed? If you didn't find the perfect gift for mother's day, don't worry. There is no one perfect gift. All our mothers are different in the gifts they enjoy. Yet mothers are the same in one respect. They are all human, just like us: they are beautiful and flawed, strong and fragile, mortal and larger than life. What do mother's appreciate most on Mother's day? I wonder if it the best gift a mother can receive is for us to allow

ourselves to be gathered. To spend time our mothers, on the phone or in person, is perhaps the best gift. After all every good mother's desire is to gather her children together, to be with them, hover, protect, brood.

Perhaps here is no one right way to honor Jesus the Mother hen either. We are all different in the gifts we have to give him. Perhaps the best we can hope for is to choose not to ignore him; that we simply pay attention to what he says to us. that we allow ourselves to be gathered to him; to find shelter under his wings, wings that extend to the farthest reaches of this earth that we call home. We are the ones who love Jesus the Mother Hen. We accept that what happened to the prophets and to him might happen to us. By living his values the world may ignore or reject us too. The world might overlook us. The world prefers an imperial power that coerces, forces, makes demands, and imposes itself on others. The power of the mothe hen is the power of wings to enfold and care. In the face of opposition the love of a mother, the love of God, does not give up nor does it give in. It keeps on loving.

That is good news indeed. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.