

The Second Sunday in Lent
February 20-21, 2015
Luke 13:31-35

“Mother Hen”

Locally grown is all the rage with food these days. How many of you frequent farmers markets during the growing season? Yup, we are all on a search to find the freshest and best food we can. Restaurants and grocery stores are all over this trend as well. They do their best to resource through local growers to ensure that what they have to offer is worth your money. So, in my secret life that nobody knows about I would love to have my own backyard chickens. Actually, I would love to have my own bees too, but that idea does not have the approval of my better half. Back to the chickens: there is a growing movement – even in urban areas – for people to have their own chickens. Think fresh eggs and meat from your own backyard! Local jurisdictions are addressing this trend with rules and regs that are opening up possibilities for people. Right here in Fairfax County, if your property is more than two acres, you don't have to jump through any hoops; just get your chickens! If your property is under two acres, then it gets a little more complicated, but not impossible. You have to obtain a special permit from the Fairfax County Department of Planning and Zoning (<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/nvswcd/newsletter/backyard-chickens.htm>), and you have to make sure that you have the approval of your homeowners association and your neighbors. Now this will cost you - \$435 for the permit, which certainly isn't cheap. And there has to be a hearing before the Board of Zoning Appeals, and this has to be advertised in local newspapers and neighbors have to be notified. That's a lot to go through, but if you're serious about backyard chickens, it will be worth it. So, stay tuned to the continuing saga of the pastor's dream for backyard chickens. We hear about chickens in today's Gospel lesson. Jesus grieves over his people's stubborn refusal to be gathered together under his lordship as a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings. That is the image before us on this Second Sunday in Lent and we focus on Jesus' words under the theme “Mother Hen.” May the Lord's rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus' sake.

Jesus' words in today's Gospel lesson are part of a travel narrative that Luke records as Jesus steadily makes his way toward Jerusalem (9:51-19:27). Jesus knows full well what awaits him there: rejection, suffering, death, and ultimately resurrection (9:21-22, 43-45). But that is where he is headed, and no one and nothing will get in the way of his divinely appointed mission. So when the Pharisees warn Jesus to get away from Herod's rule and kingdom, they're not kidding. They know what this crazy tyrant is capable of, and if Jesus isn't fearful for his life, they are! Jesus then calls Herod a “fox” – not a compliment. To call someone a fox is to call that person cunning, sneaky, and wily. And that certainly was Herod. So it's interesting that Jesus juxtaposes the two animals here: the fox and the hen. We've even got a phrase to go with this: “That's like the fox guarding the hens.” But Jesus also speaks of the necessity of going forward in ministry even with that fox lurking about. He's not going to go into hiding, but presses on with his mission: **“Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course”** (Luke 13:32). That “third day” talk points us ahead to Easter when Jesus rose from the dead on the third day! You see, neither Herod nor any other fox-like tyrant, powerful though they may be, can withstand the kingdom of God or the Son of God. The prophet Jeremiah in today's Old Testament lesson certainly had his back up against the wall and was threatened with death. But Jeremiah, like the Lord Jesus himself, remained **“steadfast, immovable, abounding in the work of the Lord”** (1 Corinthians 15:58). And Paul himself tells us in today's Epistle lesson: **“Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved”** (Philippians 4:1).

Jesus' heart breaks for the people to whom he was sent – people whose hearts are hardened against him. The city of Jerusalem and its people represent this hardness of heart, this stubborn rejection of the very

One whom the Lord God has sent to bring about their salvation. Luke does not record if Jesus wept when he said these words, but we do know that later on when he actually came to Jerusalem, he did weep tears of grief and sorrow over the city (Luke 19:41-44). The very people he will give his life for are those he would gather together **“as a hen gathers her brood under her wings”** (Luke 13:34). Growing up on a farm, I remember well little Bantam hens with their broods of chicks, foraging for food all around the barnyard, exploring every nook and cranny. What I do not remember is Mother Hen clucking and calling to her chicks to come together under the shelter of her protective wings, and they did not come. That did not happen. The point here is that God’s creatures, including chickens, are often wiser and more obedient than we are. We could learn something from them.

What a terrible sentence of condemnation Jesus speaks against Jerusalem, and indeed against every heart that refuses his saving love: **“How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! Behold, your house is forsaken”** (Luke 13:34b). How about us? Are we willing? Will we stubbornly reject Jesus’ gracious invitation to forgiveness, life, and salvation, insisting on doing it our way? Will we continue to try going it alone rather than be gathered under the protecting wings of the Son of God who loves us and gave his very life on the cross for us? As the psalmist reminds us: **“... under his wings you will find refuge”** (Psalm 91:4). And at the end of the day, at the end of life, at the end of the world, isn’t that what we want and need: refuge? My friends, it is God alone who **“is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”** (Psalm 46:1). Receive that refuge – whether for the first time or in a new and deeper way - receive that shelter, receive that sanctuary which only God can give, and know that in God’s own Son, Jesus, He has given all of this and more to you.

During a particularly dry summer, there was a grassfire in the barnyard of a farm. After the fire had been put out, the farmer walked around to assess the damage. He found a chicken that had perished in the fire; its wings spread wide; its feathers black and burned. When the farmer picked up the dead bird, out scampered her little chicks. When the fire started, the mother hen had gathered them under her wings and protected them from the flames, but in so doing she gave her life for them. So it is with Jesus, who freely gave his life to save us. In the death of Jesus we are given life.

Gathered under the protecting wings of our Savior, as we look ahead to Easter joy, we say with all Christ’s people: **“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”** (Luke 13:35). Amen.