

Lent 2C, 2-28-2010

Luke 13:31-35

A Mothering Hen

For a long time, I was convinced I had an unfortunate childhood: You see we ...raised chickens. (*LOL would be appropriate:*)

Even 35 years ago, when farming was much smaller and more diversified, it was already becoming rare to raise chickens. Most people saw too much effort for too little return but my parents, bless them, realized that in addition to the egg money, chickens provided health benefits. *You see, each year they allowed their children to help clean the chicken house* and that *natural* form of ammonia cleaned out your lungs better than any decongestant on the market! You just can't put a price on that kind of medicine.

Each spring, we would get about 200 baby chicks from a business in Hebron NE that was called, oddly enough, *The Hatchery*. I still remember being excited to go with dad and bring home all these chirping little balls of fuzz. We put them into the freshly cleaned out chicken house, where the ammonia odor had been replaced with the unforgettable combination of *Lysol* disinfectant and freshly ground corncobs. To keep those wandering chicks safe and warm, we *encircled them with a cardboard coral* and hung heat lamps from the ceiling. It was sort of an artificial version of a mother hen's wings.

Of course, some of those little chicks were destined for our dinner table but the rest matured into egg layers. The chicken house walls were covered with wooden chicken coops, which were really nothing more than boxes with a hole in the front for a chicken to get through. Most of the time, reaching in and collecting the eggs was no big deal. Either the hen would be out to eat or a young boy could scare them out of the coop with a few solid hits on the side of the box with a big stick. But there were always those hens that wouldn't get off the nest. They got used to the banging... and shouts and hollers didn't faze them either. I even remember trying to poke them off the nest with the stick I was carrying. **Anything** so that I didn't have to put my hand in that box with the chicken still in

there! I outweighed the hen ten to one and her only weapon was a sharp beak, yet [her instinct to protect her young was a power greater than size or strength.](#)

Jesus says the [character of a mother hen](#), who gathers and protects her young, is the [character of God towards Her people](#). It is an interesting metaphor, don't you think. Jesus could have drawn from a lot of examples in the animal world. Virtually all mothers defend their young with an unrelenting determination so wouldn't a more powerful example have been more effective? You know like a mother bear, or a badger, or even a cow. Any of those would seem to give more reassurance about God's ability than a mother hen.

But what if Jesus is not commenting on the hen's ability to shelter the chicks? [What if he is more concerned with the chicks](#), you know the helpless little balls of fuzz that have a tendency to wander off on their own?

In Luke's account of the gospel, much of the action takes place while Jesus is journeying toward Jerusalem, the city at the center of Jewish life and the home of the temple. Over the long history of the people of Israel, the city has come to represent the seat of political and religious power. Jesus laments, as did the prophets of old, that Jerusalem has left the protective shelter of God's wings and [wandered away from the mercy and justice God desires](#). The picture Jesus paints is of a mothering hen trying to collect her brood but the little rascals just won't come to her. [It is a picture of pain](#) for the hen knows the dangers that are out there. The readers of Luke know that much of Jerusalem was destroyed when Roman legions put down the last of the Jewish revolts and leveled the temple in 70 AD. But the readers of Luke also know that this is the city where Jesus will be put to death by the religious and political powers of the day. The foxes continued to pursue the hen and eventually she is caught. [The only power she has left is to give her very life for the sake of the chicks.](#)

It seems like the end of the story and it would be - [except for the reality of Easter that rises to paint the world in a new light](#). The mothering hen metaphor must now break down, as do all metaphors we use to speak of God's infinite love, for death is not the end for Jesus. He is raised from the grave and that victory totally reshapes and redefines everything that comes before and everything that comes after. Despite our wandering, despite our

unwillingness and inability to keep ourselves safe, **God has not left us on our own.** God will never leave us on our own. There is no power in the universe that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So what does this mean for us as we move through this season of Lent in a stressful, and hurting, and dangerous world? **Well, for one thing, it means that none of those things will magically disappear.** Most of them are the result of living in a world full of wandering balls of fuzz, chirping and cheeping to have their own needs met. But at the same time, by the grace of God, the colors of Easter can change how we see both ourselves, and our neighbors. The end is already sure. We trust that Jesus does indeed come in the name of the Lord to save us when we need it most. **We do not have to fear...** and that gives us the courage to be free! Free to live for others. Free to move out of our comfort zones. Free to act with courage. Free to be honest about who we are and how we treat all the other little balls of fuzz on the planet. Free to give with generosity.

It will not be easy. There will be times when we fail and there will be consequences for those failures. But the Creating God of new life has a way of **hatching possibilities** that we can seldom imagine! So let's not be afraid! People like Julie and her classmates and all who work to bring healing and recovery to the people of Haiti, are the hands through which God's work is done and the voice through which God's Word is heard. We all know there are risks that go along with this work just as there are for almost anything we do in life. But I think there are bigger risks by not acting when God places an opportunity before us. It is the risk of living in fear and **becoming only a shell** of the person God desires us to be.

Like a mothering hen, God desires life for her offspring. God will go to any length to make that life a reality in our world. **God not only saves us but also works through each and every one of us,** no matter who we are or how far we have wandered. Let us return again to the shelter of God's love. Let us live life to the fullest and with courage, trusting that there is no fox that can scare away our Mothering Hen. Let us learn to fly... to Haiti... and every other place in the world where God's work needs to be done.