

2 Lent YC 2022

God our Mothering Hen
By the Rev. Salying Wong

Mama bear. Tiger mom. Chicken mommy. Which would you choose to have?

Jesus compares himself to a hen today. He does this after he compares Herod to a fox. Seriously, Jesus—of all the birds to pick! Last week, we heard of God being compared to an eagle. Yes, a powerful majestic eagle that can carry us away from our troubles, with talons fierce enough to tear apart our enemies. I have watched eagles eat their prey while they are still alive and screaming. An eagle would be a good bird to have on your side. An eagle can take a fox. But, a chicken?

We've jumped ahead a few chapters in the Gospel of Luke since last Sunday, where Jesus was tempted in the desert by the devil. To propel Jesus' Lenten journey in time for Palm Sunday on April 10, the lectionary has accelerated the action and drama. Now he's meeting up with the Pharisees in Jerusalem and they are telling him that Herod desires to kill him—and that he better get out of Jerusalem if he wants to live.

Jerusalem is symbolic for Luke the way D.C. is symbolic for us. But, it is a place of religious as well as political power. Often, power ran amok. Those who have the greatest power in Jerusalem are the religious elite at the Temple, Herod the puppet king, and the Roman occupants. Interestingly, it is the Pharisees, religious leaders in the synagogue and not the temple, who tell Jesus that Herod desires to kill him; they could have been sincerely giving Jesus a warning. They had seen what Herod did with John the Baptist. But Jesus doesn't seem to care about his own safety. He said to them, "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. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.'"

Again, Jerusalem is symbolic here as a place of power. Not all martyred prophets were killed in Jerusalem. But it is places like Jerusalem—place of power—that God sends the prophets to correct their ways. But, they are unwilling places. Instead of changing their minds and stopping the madness of violence and power, they kill the prophets.

Even so, Jesus looks upon such places with the divine desire to mother the wayward. “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!”

Unwilling. Stubborn. Obstinate. Our human impulse is to find our meaning and identity in power, even by violence. But God offers us the way to return to ourselves, our true nature, which is belonging in God. Jesus paints us a picture of a God who is a mothering hen, a hen who wishes for her children a belonging under the abode of her wings. At the end of the road to Jerusalem, Jesus will offer his life as a hen among foxes to show forth God's love for us, even in the midst of our human proclivities toward destruction. Jesus gives his life for all, but only the willing can receive what he offers.

What if we were willing? What does it mean to be willing?

When I look at the picture of the hen on our bulletin cover, with all the chicks gathered under her, I think, there's little room in there for anything else if everyone is gathered. If we were willing to gather under God's wings, we have to release anything we're carrying, be they guns or grudges. We have to make room for all others who gather there, as God gives the same space as everyone else. The question is, do we desire to be under these wings more than anything, more than anything that we think makes us who we are other than God?

One central word in the gospel reading for today is “desire”—incompletely emphasized in the NRSV translation. The word “desire”(*thelō*) is used three times

in our short passage: Herod desires to kill Jesus. Jesus desires to gather Jerusalem under her wings. And, Jerusalem does not desire it. Today, I invite you to get to your deepest level of desire. What is the deep, deep desire within you? What are you willing to give over to live in that desire?

It isn't so simple to live within God's desire because of the competing desires of the ego. We often don't know how enslaved we are to the provocations of our egos. Recently, my niece has been raising chicks so that she can harvest eggs. I asked her how it was going. She said, "The chicks are so stupid! They get so focussed on what they want, they'd jump off a cliff to get it—and they don't even know what it is that they think they want. They think it is food, but it is their own poop. They're so stupid!"

Well, there you go. Let us be mindful of what we chase after. Let us slow down and hush our egoic chase. Let us desire the desire of Jesus. Let us move into that direction with so much desire that we're willing to let go of what we think we want for the God who is our actual desire. Let us abide within the wings of our mother God.