

The Second Sunday in Lent, March 16, 2025
St. Michaels Church
The Rev. Joshua Wong
Gospel: Luke 13:1-9

Focus: Jesus is like a mother hen, always welcoming us.

Function: I am writing to my parishioners to let them know that Jesus always welcomes us to accept his love, he gathers us like a mother hen who protect and defend her children.

Let us pray:

Dear Jesus, as a mother hen, you remind us of the depth of your affection and the fragility, vulnerability and foolishness we are as your chicks. We praise you for gathering us under your wings next to your heart. *Amen.*

Our Gospel passage comes this week at an opportune time when the internet is buzzing around the three Bald eaglets that were just hatched on top of a tree in Big Bear Lake. Every hour, thousand watch parents Jackie and Shadow play the role of protecting, feeding and raising their new born family. Just like the Mother Hen metaphor in today's Gospel, Jackie and Shadow, protect their eaglets from predators, in their case, flying squirrels and ravens, all for the sake of loving, nurturing and protecting their eaglets.

We heard in our reading of the Gospel that the Pharisees warned Jesus of Herod's plans to find him and kill him, yet he was focused on Jerusalem. Jesus knew the inevitable was coming, even the language he uses convey the meaning of Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. Jesus exhibits what author and

professor Brene' Brown calls a "strong back and soft front." Jesus exhibits a fearless backbone as well as an open heart of love as he continues onto Jerusalem even when a threat to his life awaits him.

Today I'd like to focus on the second half of the reading. "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!"

This month is Women's History Month, and this week's passage includes one of the New Testament's most striking woman-centered images for God: Jesus' portrayal of himself as a mother hen, extending her wings to gather her chicks. But on this second Sunday in Lent, Luke's Gospel invites us to contemplate Jesus as a mother hen whose chicks don't want her. Though she stands with her wings wide open, offering welcome, belonging, and shelter, her children refuse to come home to her. Her wings — her arms — are empty. This, in other words is a mother in mourning, sad and lonely. A mother struggling with failure and uselessness.

Debie Thomas, the author of *Into the Mess and Other Jesus Stories*, which is a collection of essays that explores the life and teachings of Jesus, says that as a child growing up visiting her grandparents in a farm, she would watch the hens

interact. She noticed that they could be fierce when they wanted to be, yet defenseless and vulnerable. She said, “I’ve seen mother hens gather their chicks under their wings when a predator approaches. The way they swell with indignation, fear, and courage. The way they stand their ground. The way they prepare to die if they have to, their children tucked securely beneath their soft, vulnerable bodies. Today’s Gospel uses this image as a profound and radical picture of Jesus’ invitation to the world before his path to crucifixion and ascension.

If maternal power, skillfulness, or success were the characteristics Jesus wanted to emphasize in his choice of metaphor, he could have easily used any number of more appropriate Old Testament images to make his point. Such as a mother of healthy, happy toddlers; also a skilled midwife, both of which are found in Psalm; God as the enraged she-bear in Hosea; God as a soaring mother eagle in Deuteronomy; or God as a laboring woman in Isaiah. But these are not the images Jesus purposely choose. Instead it is of a vulnerable, yet protective mother calling out to her chicks.

In the verses that precede this heartbreaking description, a group of Pharisees warn Jesus to leave the area where he is teaching and healing, because Herod wants to

kill him. He tells the Pharisees that he's not afraid of "that fox." And yet, even as he stands up to a "fox," Jesus is a frustrated mother wailing in grief for his chicks who don't want her.

What teaching does this image of God, the mother hen, offer us for our own Lenten journeys?

First, during Lent, we are called to **embrace our vulnerability**. Yes, Jesus mocks Herod by calling him a fox. But he never argues that the fox doesn't exist or isn't dangerous. He never promises his children immunity from harm. What Jesus the mother hen promises us is not the absence of danger, but the fullness of his wholly vulnerable self in the face of all that threatens and scares us. We can be assured when we are scared and threatened that Jesus is with us. What he gives is his own body, his own life. Wings spread open, heart exposed, shade and warmth and shelter always when we need it. What he promises us is a place of refuge and return for his children. For all of his children — even the ones who want to stone and kill him. And even to those who have gone away for a long time. As parents, we know what it means to love our children. How often, we save a room for our children in case they need to come home. In the Gospel of Matthew it says, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much

more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” This is the extent of love awaiting us in Christ Jesus.

Besides embracing our vulnerability this Lent, secondly, we are **called to lament** of all that troubles us in our lives, both present and past. All of us, regardless of our circumstances, can mourn the missed opportunities, broken promises, or crushed hopes we have experienced. As humans, we know what it looks like to fail in our best efforts to protect, help, advise, or save someone or a relationship. We know the grief we experience when we watch someone we care about self-destruct before our eyes. All of us who live in this broken world carry painful memories of unanswered love, unmet desire, and unfulfilled dreams.

In our Gospel passage, Jesus laments as well. He longs and grieves for his lost and wandering children. For the little ones who will not come home. For the city that will not welcome its savior. “How often have I desired to gather you,” Jesus says. It is a lamentation for the real limits we live with as human beings. As a pastor, I often long, wonder and lament for many people who have come through our doors, and lament for their well-being. Sometimes, like Jesus the mother hen, we can’t do what we most desire to do. We can’t give what we deeply long to give. We can’t

save the loved ones we ache to save. It is at this time that we remember Matthew 11:28: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest, Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

And finally, after lamenting, we are called to **return to the Mother hen** who offers us safety, welcome and healing. It is not enough for us in Lent to acknowledge our vulnerability and lament about our lives. Lent is about finding nurture in God. The image of chicks snuggling under a mother hen’s wings is an image of gathering, of community, of intentional oneness. But it requires us to return. A surrender. A healing. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, How often have I desired to gather you?” We need to ask ourselves, what do I need to do to come back to God? Why am I still wandering away?

I won’t lie; loving a vulnerable mother hen God is the riskiest thing some of us can imagine doing. We’d prefer the lion, perhaps. Or the infuriated bear. And yet a yearning mother hen is the mother we belong to. She’s the one weeping for us. She’s the one calling us home, and the home she’s calling us to is profoundly communal. As I said during Lent, this season is not meant to be journeyed alone.

Our walk in Christ is meant to be done together. That's why we come together, that is why we have Communion together. The reach of the mother hen's wings is wide. The hospitality of her shelter is vast. Her body and her heart are on the line, and yet her desire is fixed on us. On all of us and she will never, ever stop calling us home. I believe that our life-giving, loving, liberating God gives all, gathers all and draws us all toward a shared wholeness with one another.

Home can mean different things to you. It can be about returning from wandering off on our own. Home could be about a community you find yourself part of, like St. Michael's, where we care for each other and where we grow together as the body of Christ. Home can be about resolving relationships with truth and honesty so that we become more whole. No matter where home is for you, it begins by grounding yourself in the safety of God's love in the person of Jesus Christ. To come home, it requires us to accept our vulnerability, lament of our pain, and then act—return to the safety of God. St. Michael's is a place of home, where God's love is present, where God's welcome is extended to everyone and where healing occurs over and over again.

During the season of Lent, when we are heading to Jerusalem with Jesus, may the longing of Jesus become our longing, as well. Jesus welcomes us to accept his love, he gathers us like a mother hen to protect and defend her children. Will we accept Jesus' call to lead us home, no matter where we have been or what offenses we think we have done, or how long we have been away. Jesus' out stretched arms and open heart awaits you and welcomes you back into the fold. *Amen.*

He 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. 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.'" Jesus said, "I have work left to do, he tells them, and I won't be deterred by a bully." At this point in the story, Jesus has set his course for Jerusalem, the city that rejects God's messengers and kills its prophets. Jesus knows exactly what fate awaits him there, but he won't change course. Not for Herod, not for anyone.