

Lent 2 – C
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As soon as our nine-year-old daughter joined our family, she immediately bonded with the many animals we had on our miniature farm in WA State. Our yard was full of chickens which as you might expect often hatched baby chicks. The mother hens were so protective that we sometimes didn't even know they had a brood under her wings until we heard the chicks peeping. When our daughter was about four, a chick ventured forth from the mother hen and my daughter scooped it up in her curious hands. We had talked to her about not playing with the baby chicks by herself because of the possibility of the mother hen pecking her. However, this one time when we were not being 100% vigilant, she found the temptation too hard to resist. In a flash she climbed up a very large fort we had in the backyard and started playing with the chick at the top of the fort. My husband was not far behind her calling to her in one of those illogical moments of panicked parenting: "Lee-Joan put the chick down." Startled by this admonition Lee-Joan put the chick down all right. In fact, she threw the chick down from the top of the fort. The chick was barely alive, staggering around the ground but in fact this chick not only lived, he became the family favorite, an enormous rooster whom we named Lucky.

Today's gospel reading has the only reference of which I am aware in scripture in which Jesus uses a feminine image to describe himself. Luke 13:35: "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 is an extraordinary piece of scripture. We are all familiar with the many "I am" statements from John's gospel in which Jesus says things such as "I am the Good Shepherd." or "I am the bread of life." But Jesus as a protective hen...

This image of Jesus as the loving protector is comforting. It comes from an era in which Jerusalem had become a dangerous place for anyone who challenged the status quo of the Roman authorities. Going against the political powers of the day was a decidedly dangerous activity. And so Jesus longed to protect his followers as a hen protects her chicks. The image of God as a motherly bird is not unheard of in the Old Testament. In the book of Ruth, we hear about: "The Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge. (Ruth 2:12) In Deuteronomy we hear: "As an eagle stirs up her nest, and hovers over her young, the Lord alone guided him." (Dt. 32:11-12) The psalms give us this image as well: "Hide me in the shadow of your wings" or "All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings" (Psalm 17:8)

All of these images express the intense need for protection in a time of great danger and risk. The further along we move in the season of Lent, the more we hear about the hostilities being directed at Jesus. "This man eats with tax collectors, this man heals on the Sabbath, this man tells us we will not enter the kingdom of God if we do not visit prisoners or feed the hungry or pay attention to the widows." Then to top it off, this Jesus hurls insults at the political authority of his day by calling Herod a fox. Whatever Jesus

meant by calling Herod a fox, we can know for sure is that it was not a compliment. This Jesus was a threatening man indeed.

This week I saw the new movie *Amazing Grace*. It is the story of William Wilberforce a remarkable man in the 18th century who struggled between a career in the English Parliament and a calling to the ministry. In the end he chose to go into politics with one idea in his heart, the end of slavery. It is a wonderful movie but not quite action packed enough for the average movie audience so I'm sure it won't last long in the theatres. Through this movie, we are drawn into the drama of the English abolition movement. Today we might be able to say with self-assurance: "Well of course slavery was wrong. What could people have been thinking of? Human merchandise...How disgusting!!!" But in the 18th century, the case was not so clear. Through this movie, we enter into a time when this issue was not so cut and dry. We enter into a time when to speak out against slavery was risky. Of course, the beauty of a movie such as this is that we can easily transfer the struggle to the hot topics of today such as that with which the international Anglican Communion is wrestling. Anytime we speak out on behalf of the rejected, there is a cost.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem – this was the city in which those who followed Jesus were not safe. Luke is clear that Herod the fox had the sole interest of protecting the status quo. The problem for the people of Jerusalem was that they were willing to acquiesce to Herod's proclamations and not ask too many questions. The same was true for the majority of the people in 18th century England, William Wilberforce was not afraid to ask questions, the same question over and over again for 16 years until finally in 1807 a law was passed to abolish slavery.

Churches in today's world are called to ask questions in much the same way as Jesus asked the hard questions of his day and William Wilberforce asked in his day. Yesterday we had our Visioning Day and it was such a good day for those who came. It was an opportunity for us to look at who we are as a parish and consider where we might be headed. It was a time of visioning. What might the future hold for us? What do we do well and where are the opportunities for us at this time. It was a time for us to think about stretching our status quo and venturing into new areas of interest. At least a few people asked: "What would it look like if we reinstated a ministry with the prison on Beck Rd." I drive by that prison everyday on my way to church. And when I do, I wonder what goes on behind the layers of gates and walls. Sometimes when the weather is better I see the women walking around on the grounds and I wonder about Jesus' words when dividing the sheep and the goats: "When I was in prison, you did not visit me."

The general population in much of our community does not seem to be too concerned about the state of their souls. People just murk along in the daily grind, not really asking questions about justice, mercy and their relationship with God. However, when we do think about the state of our souls in relationship to the gospel, we would be wise to consider the issues of justice and mercy over the hair splitting of scripture or doctrine. If Jerusalem was a dangerous place for the followers of Jesus, then today's world is equally unsafe for those who dare to befriend the despised and rejected.

As we follow Jesus into Jerusalem with whatever calls of mercy and justice speak to us, we need to be grounded in our faith, hovered together like chicks under the wings of a hen, providing each other strength and security. It is through these relationships, the relationships with each other and with Jesus that we are able to move forward as the people of God in this day and age.