

Full to the Brim – Under God’s Wing
Luke 13: 31-34
Don Lincoln

On the western slope of the Mount of Olives, just across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem, sits a small chapel called Dominus Flevit.



The name comes from Luke’s account of Jesus’ grief over Jerusalem. According to tradition, the chapel is built on the site where Jesus wept over the city that would refuse his ministry.

Inside the chapel, the altar is centered before a high arched window that looks

out over Jerusalem. Iron grillwork divides the view into sections, so that on a sunny day the effect is that of a stained glass window.

Two thirds of the view is the cloudless blue sky like a quilt of blue squares with the city below.

Down below, on the front of the altar is a mosaic medallion of a white hen with a golden halo around her head.



Her red comb resembles a crown, and her wings are spread wide to shelter seven pale yellow chicks crowded around her feet. They look happy to be there. The hen looks ready to spit fire if anyone comes near her babies.

The medallion is rimmed with red words in Latin. Translated into English they read, "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!"

Did you know Luke mentions Jerusalem 90 times in his Gospel, while all the other New Testament writers combined mention it only 49 times? It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Luke deeply loves the place so rich in history and symbolism, so dense with expectation and fear.¹

How much more it appears from this text – even more evident, more clear – how much **Jesus loves Jerusalem**? The place where God's glory shall be revealed? The center of God's saving action – and at the same time, the place that betrays the ways and the will of God, the city that stones God's prophets?

You can sense the pathos in Jesus' words – and all the more poignant is that Jesus picks the mother hen as an image for himself.

But you know – until Jesus spoke these words, I can't imagine anyone was thinking chicken with all the "under the wing" phrases in the book of Psalms:

Psalm 57 – In the shadow of your wings I will take refuge,

Psalm 91 – You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust." For He will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you will find refuge.

If maternal power, acumen, or success were the characteristics Jesus wanted to emphasize in his choice of metaphor, he could have used any number of more appealing Old Testament images to make his point.²

God as enraged she-bear (Hosea 13). God as laboring woman (Isaiah 42). God as mom of a healthy, happy toddler (Psalm 131). God as skilled midwife (Psalm 22). God as soaring mother eagle with her talons (Deuteronomy 32) or God as a mamma lioness and her fangs (Joel 1). But those are not the images Jesus chooses.

Jesus picks the chicken. And not only the chicken – but Jesus picks the chicken after calling Herod a fox. You can't help but go toward that well-known phrase that's used so often to describe impending, absolute disaster– a fox in the henhouse.

But the image is a potent one. If you've ever witnessed a mother hen with her little ones when a sudden break in the weather, with lightening or thunder and saw the chicks scurry under her wings. Or a hawk is seen from a shadow overhead and the mother's call – "come, children, gather" – and instinctively they scurry under her wings.

Jesus longs to protect Jerusalem from itself. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem...” Repeating the name, perhaps out of affection, perhaps with the tender grief of a parent whose **child has gotten into trouble yet again**. Do you know that pain – that angst? Think of what Jesus is feeling.

And how often had Jesus had this lament, this cry, this weeping desire to call Jerusalem? The wording suggests he had dwelt on this lovely, evocative image many times. “Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often have I desired to gather you.....”³ Here is Jesus as a mother hen who stands with her wings wide open, offering welcome, belonging, and shelter to all her children, even those who refuse to come home.

And what we know better than anything else, is what we know from the Gospel: Jesus won't be king of the jungle in this **or any other story**. What He will be is a mother hen, who stands between the chicks and those who mean to do them harm. This mother hen has no fangs, no claws, no rippling muscles. All she has is her willingness to shield her babies with her own body. If the fox wants them, he will have to kill her first.

There are stories of farmyard fires or forest fires – where when cleaning up afterwards, a farmer or a forest worker has found a dead hen, scorched and blackened – with live chicks still sheltering under her wings. Quite literally, having given her life to save them. It is a vivid image of what Jesus said he longed to do for Jerusalem, and indeed all humanity.⁴ And what Jesus ultimately does.

In the face of all the foxes and fears of this world; confronting all the inner and outer dangers that threaten his children. Taking on all the brokenness and pride and power and meanness and sinful actions that threaten our lives – Jesus gives his own body, his own life.

Wings spread open, heart exposed; what Jesus promises, is to **make His very being into a place of refuge, safety, and return for His children**. For all of His children — even the ones who want to stone and kill him – even the ones who have taken to following the foxes of this world.⁵

I hadn't really ruminated on this story all that much until this week. But do you hear what's in this story? Jesus expressing that you are a precious child of God – one of God's little chicks. God longs for you; longs to gather you into God's shade and warmth and shelter. No matter how much you and I may have tried in life – intentionally or otherwise – to separate ourselves from God – or the foxes of this world have tried to separate us from God's good and gracious love. God's wings are spread wide on the cross of Jesus Christ to bring you and me home – to welcome, to protection, to love and life. “Come home, my children, come home.”

God so loved the world. It rings true in this passage. God's love for you and me – no matter who we are, no matter what we have or haven't done, is fuller than any one of us can imagine or comprehend. Watch this video of Maya Angelou – someone who really got it.

Maya Angelou – video translation

There's a book called *Lessons in Truth* and in the book there's a line which is "God loves me." When I came to read it to my then mentor, Fredrick Wilkerson, (the late Frederick Wilkerson), I read "God loves me." He said, "Read it again." I said "God **loves** me." He said, "Read it again." "Read it again." And finally I said, "**God loves ME.**" (Sigh). It still humbles me that this Force which made leaves and fleas and stars and rivers and you, loves me. Me, Maya Angelou. It's amazing! I can do anything and do it well. Any good thing, I can do it. That's why I'm who I am. Yes, because God loves me and I'm amazed at it and grateful for it.

Jesus says it so simply here. The mother hen of the universe loves you. And longs to gather you and me under her wing. **May you know it even more today than you did yesterday.** Say it with Maya Angelou. "God loves me." **Church, say it: God loves me.**

May you know it – **may you know it** to be so. AMEN.

1. Barbara Brown Taylor, "Living by the Word," *Christian Century*, February 25, 1998.
2. Debie Thomas, "I Have Longed," www.journeywithjesus.net, March 6, 2022.
3. *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year C, Volume 2, 2nd Sunday of Lent.*
4. NT Wright, *The New Testament for Everyone, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke.*
5. Thomas, *op. cit.*