

Luke 13:31-35
March 13, 2022

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

When I was a kid and we went to my grandmother's house in Nebraska, I was tasked with the chore of getting the eggs from the hen house. I hated that job soooooo much! I dreaded it.

As I walked to the henhouse I had music of foreboding running through my head as I kicked rocks, and mumbled to myself. There was nothing I hated more than having to face hens who were sitting on their eggs.

When I got to the henhouse, I'd take a deep breath and walk in the door. I'd eye my first chicken and she'd eye me. I could tell she was saying – don't you come over here! I'll peck your eye out.

I wanted to run for the house and just say there were no eggs today. Every once in a while I'd just skip an angry looking mom, and then I'd get in trouble when there was a chick in the egg.

Have you ever had to get eggs out from under a hen?

My mom had taught me the "secret" for getting the eggs. You have to go around back of the hen so that she won't "see you," but they always saw me and then - peck! My hand would get it! And it hurt. They can really peck hard.

I think calling a person a chicken is a misnomer. You're such a chicken – bok bok. Clearly whoever came up with that insult had never met my grandmother's sitting hens. They weren't afraid of anything when they were protecting their eggs, or those chicks that hatched b/c I didn't get the eggs out in time.

Momma hens are super protective and not just against people who want to eat their eggs. When a fox got into my grandmother's hen house, those hens gave that fox what for. They would not go down without a fight! The momma hen might get killed, but her little ones would live to see another day.

And when the fox showed up while the hens were in the yard, the hens would gather up all of the little chicks around her, so that she could protect them, just like Jesus is talking about in the Gospel lesson today.

Jesus wants to gather us all under his wings so that we won't be killed by the fox, the sneaky fox, who is beautiful, but only has dinner and death on its mind. The momma hen also only has her chicks on her mind, but to keep them alive, to keep them from being killed and becoming dinner, so she gathers them up and gives her life for them.

There is nothing like a momma hen.

Often my grandmother would buy chicks from the co-op and had them in the little chicken house next to the hen house. It had warming lights and lots of food and water. One time a fox got in there and it had a great feast. It gobbled up all of those poor little chicks.

The chicken house wasn't enough to keep them alive. If only they had had a mother hen to take care of them. The chicken house, the building, couldn't save those poor little chicks. It could protect them from the elements and they were provided with what they needed there, but the house wasn't enough to keep them alive.

The house is inanimate, it's just a house, but a mother hen is a beast to be reckoned with. She will give her life so that the little ones will survive.

Herod was a fox. Jesus is the mother hen. And, the chicken house, was the temple – an empty house that couldn't protect them. Shelter, yes, but it wasn't alive. It couldn't go to battle for them. All it could do was just stand there.

During the season of Lent, we remember the 1st Commandment – God is God and we are not. Today Jesus reminds us that God is a mother hen with outstretched wings who welcomes us all into her security. Who goes out and gathers us in.

It's not the house that is important. It's God. The Pharisees and other religious leaders had forgotten that. They were so obsessed with the chicken house, that the fox had made, that they forgot God is with them – living among them, loving them, and their only sure defense.

They had fallen into the sin of thinking their security came from doing instead of receiving – doing sacrifice at the temple, instead of receiving God's grace and mercy.

Herod had the Temple in Jerusalem built in order to keep the peace – the Roman peace – a peace that was built on violence and intimidation, not sacrificial love.

Although he liked to be called King of the Jews, Herod had very little to do with God. Herod only served the emperor and his own self-interest. He was as far from the promised shepherd king of the Jews as you can get, but the people in Jerusalem couldn't see it. They were so wrapped up in empire and power, that they couldn't even see God in their midst.

While Jesus was healing people and casting out demons, the Pharisees cast Jesus out of their presence. And he goes on his way, but he doesn't stop doing what he was called to do. Threats mean nothing to him, because there is nothing stronger than God, and soon Jesus' arms will be fully open on the cross welcoming all people under his protective wings.

During Lent, we remember that we are to die for – even the Pharisees and religious leaders. God's wings are open to everyone on the cross. Jesus takes on the beating and killing for us, while at the same time bringing us healing.

We are sheltered under his arms. Under the cross, we are safe from the fox who wants to eat us, the fox who wants to use us for its selfish gain, and we are reminded that we are God's dearly beloved.

God loves us eternally and unconditionally, and with the knowledge of that unending love, there is nothing we can't face, because we are safe in God's love. Nothing can destroy it.

We aren't just some weak little chickies. We have a momma hen that goes to the cross for us, and refuses to leave us even in death. She is resurrected on the third day and through the Holy Spirit there is nothing that will ever separate us from her and that love.

The real power is not with the fox nor in the chicken house. The real power is the mother hen, our mother hen.

Thanks be to God. Amen.