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St. James', Mt. Airy
3/17/19

Lent 2C
Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18
Psalm 27
Philippians 3:14-4:1
Luke 13:31-35

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;
take our hands and work through them;
take our hearts and set them on fire.
Amen.**

We are in Lent, and once again Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem.

This is the course we saw set when he traveled down the mountain after the Transfiguration, and though much happens along the way, nothing deters him from his destination, even though he knows what is waiting for him there.

The entire central section of the Gospel of Luke, from the end of chapter 9 through most of chapter 19, is taken up with Jesus' journey to Jerusalem – and today's passage is right in the middle.

There is so much that can be teased apart in these few verses: the play of images between the fox and the hen, political power and threats of violence, a cry of lament, and death and resurrection.

It is these last two – lament and death and resurrection – that I want to focus on today. They are eternal themes, the things we turn to when the world around us is unstable and unsafe.

Jesus knew this. This whole passage is about his world being unstable and unsafe – it begins with a warning that Herod wants to kill him after all.

And after the mass shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand on Friday – another in a long line of white supremacist terrorist attacks on people of faith in their houses of worship – it is hard to feel like the world is anything but unstable and unsafe.

But God promises something **more** than the ways of the world.

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In the face of violence and hatred in today’s Gospel, Jesus turned to lament: *“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! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”*

It is such a powerful form of prayer. When we lament, we question WHY?; we rail against life and unfairness and even God; we shake our fists in anger; and we cry.

But we always end our lament with trust and hope. We circle back to the promise that God made to always be with us – and that that will be enough.

Seeing Jesus lament in scripture teaches us that our laments are indeed sacred ways of reaching out to God in times of sorrow, confusion, and pain. That when the feelings we feel are too big for our bodies, when the world around us doesn’t make sense, when we feel most alone – that God is there embracing us and gathering us close.

And the image we are given for this assurance is that of the hen gathering her brood under her wings.

The homely hen, who has lived in the backyards of humans for thousands of years, who is selfless in her devotion to her little ones, who will sacrifice herself if it means there is a chance her chicks will survive.

The hen is for us a symbol of both death and resurrection – a circular image encompassing both.

Picture in your minds' eye what a hen looks like as she scurries to gather her little ones under her wings as danger approaches. What do you see? Wings outstretched – like arms outstretched on the cross. Death may await, but that is not the end.

Because in Luke's Gospel, while the cross is essential, the resurrection is the focal point of Jesus' saving work. The Way of Life vanquishes the powers of death – and that victory culminates not when Jesus breathes his last on the cross, but when he leaves the “linen cloths” of death behind in the tomb.¹

If Luke's focal point for Jesus' saving mission is the resurrection, then the overall tone and theme for that mission is a fierce, tender mercy. Think of it: though humanity will kill him, Jesus nevertheless pictures us not as jackals but as vulnerable chicks that he longs to gather and embrace. Like a fierce, tender mother hen, Jesus desires to shield and love and save her children from the powers of death,² promising life eternal.

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The ways of the world too often pedal hate, fear, and death. But we are not obliged to buy into them or succumb to their grasp.

¹ Salt Project Lectionary Commentary for Lent 2.

² Salt Project Lectionary Commentary for Lent 2.

Because even as we travel through Lent, we are Easter people – which means we are people of hope, mercy, and love.

We too are hens, called to stretch out our wings in love – gathering the lost, the least, and the last – those the world can so easily gobble up – and using our strength and power to shelter and send them forth into new life.

My prayer for us as we make our Lenten pilgrimage is that we feel fully the world and all it has to offer – both bad and good – but that we don't let it turn our hearts to stone, and instead face it with arms outstretched in love.

~ AMEN ~