

**Sermon; Under her Wings Luke 13:31-35 Easter 4 Mother's Day May 8, 2022**

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On the slopes of the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron valley from Jerusalem's Temple Mount, stands the little church of *Dominus Flevit* – in Latin it means "The Lord Wept". The church is built where tradition says the gospel scene from today unfolded. The church's altar sits by a window with a view of the Temple Mount and the Golden Gate. And the altar is decorated with this Mosaic- I took this photo a few years ago- it's a depiction of Christ as mother hen, gathering her chicks beneath her protective wings.



Some years ago, in an exercise on a retreat, participants were led to choose an animal that would represent them. What animal are you? What animal might you like to be?

No doubt we admire some animals more than others. We are attracted to the strong and noble members of the wild kingdom: we might like to think of ourselves as a great bird of prey like a soaring eagle, or a dominant predator like a roaring lion, or a majestic forest creature like a wolf or moose. There are others of God's creatures that we find less appealing: who wants to see themselves as a snake or rat or skunk?

Sports teams choose animal names to project a certain power and image. The Detroit Tigers, the BC Lions, The Toronto Blue Jays- Blue Jays are beautiful, but also feisty and aggressive.

On a recent trip to Northern California, we encountered the University of California Bears at UC Berkeley and the Fighting Banana Slugs of UC Santa Cruz.

Scripture too will use God's creatures to reflect on the Creator.

In Hosea, God is like a stealthy leopard waiting to pounce, a mighty lion on the hunt, an angry mother bear separated from her cubs...

The Holy Spirit in Scripture is depicted as wind and fire but also is pictured as a dove descending

Beyond the Bible, CS Lewis represents Jesus as the mighty Aslan, the Lion of Judah on the prowl. While in Scripture the Holy Spirit may be seen as a gentle dove, in the Celtic tradition, the Wild Goose is a symbol of the Holy Spirit: wild, roaming, and free,

Today we hear Jesus compare himself to a mother hen.

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Looking at the Holy City Jesus says:

"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, but you were not willing?"

Looking at Jerusalem, Jesus pictures God's people, us, and sees not some majestic animal but pale, yellow, tiny, and vulnerable chicks.

And Jesus sees himself, not as the lion of Judah, but as a chicken, a mother hen, clucking for all she's worth, calling her children to safety, wanting to cover her chicks with her wings.

Picture Jesus as a mother hen, calling her chicks, spreading her wings in pleading invitation. Given the number of animals available, isn't it strange that Jesus chooses to be a hen. Not a lion or an eagle but a chicken.

And...it's a mother hen, not a rooster.

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On this Mother's Day we can notice the maternal image that Jesus chooses. He is a mother hen, gathering her young. And while the Christian tradition has worked hard to connect the male gender to God, Scripture is full of maternal images for the Holy

- Hosea pictures God as a nurturing mother (Hosea 11:3-4), as an enraged mother bear protecting her cubs (Hosea 13:8).
- In Deuteronomy, God is pictured as a soaring mother eagle carrying her young on her back (Deuteronomy 32:11-12,) and as the one who labored to give birth to God's people (32:18)
- Isaiah compares the Holy One to a woman in labour (Isaiah 42:14), to a mother remembering the child she has nursed and raised (Isaiah 49:15), to a woman comforting her child with her embrace (66:13).
- The Psalmist sees God as the mom of a healthy, happy toddler (Psalm 131:2), pictures God as skilled midwife bringing life into the world. (Psalm 22:9-10).
- And now Jesus says that he is like a mother hen.

Jesus says that he is like a mother hen and that language would have resonated with those who heard his words. In the Psalms, the Hebrew song book they sing: "Hide me in the shadow of your wings," 17:8. "In the shadow of your wings I will take refuge till the storms pass by," 57:1.

“Oh to be safe under the shelter of your wings,” 61:4. “In the shadow of your wings I sing for joy,” 63:7.

It is interesting that the mother hen imagery that Jesus used never gained much traction in the church. We know by the art of the early church that the Good Shepherd image was very popular. The Holy Spirit is pictured as a dove and dove images abound even here in our sanctuary. The resurrection symbol of the Phoenix is not uncommon. And there are songs and symbols involving eagles.

Maybe we need to spend more time with the image of the mother hen.

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In some parts of the Christian tradition, we are enamored with particular images of Jesus. In her book *Jesus and John Wayne*, Historian Kristin Kobe Du Mez details how American evangelicals became enamored of a muscular warrior Christ; it's a tradition that pictures Jesus in a way that Jesus never chooses for himself. They favour Christ on horseback from the Revelation, wielding a sword, awash in the blood of his enemies and all this is packaged with a very toxic form of masculinity. Men are to be Biblical warriors with women submitting to them. It's Jesus as a strong man. And surely, we have had enough of strong men imposing their will on the world. Gods save us from so called strong men, from idolizing power and domination.

Maybe on this Christian Family Sunday, on this Mothers day we need to honor Jesus' image, one that he used himself, Jesus as the mother hen.

A mother hen is not powerful. She is vulnerable.

She is not dominating. She is loving.

She does not act violently; she protects, even at the cost of her own life.

She does not force, she invites, pleads, calls, mourns, waits...

She offers refuge; she embodies courage,

She lives with patience and longing for all her children to be safe, together. Under her wings.

We would prefer the lion, perhaps. Or the infuriated bear. Or a soaring eagle

And yet a yearning mother hen is the one we belong to. Jesus sees himself as the mother hen inviting her scatted chicks to take refuge under the warmth of her wings.