

Lectionary C February 21, 2016 Lent 2
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, IN
Pastor Roberta Meyer

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

Covenants and Mother Hens

Did Abram understand the seriousness of this promise God is giving him? *"**Do not** be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great...Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be."*

Well, it took a while. In fact, it took so long, Abram had a hard time seeing how God would keep this promise. After all, he and his wife were old and there were no children. But this was more than a promise, this was a covenant God made with Abram. The symbolism in this story, depicts how far God will go to keep this covenant.

The dream Abram had after he followed God's instructions about the sacrifices seals this covenant with God's life. *"²¹ When the sun was down and it was dark, **a smoking firepot** and a flaming torch moved between the split carcasses. That's when GOD made a covenant with Abram: "I'm giving this land to your children." First of all the smoking firepot and flaming torch are symbols of God. In a covenant ceremony the party or parties making the covenant would walk through the pieces of the sacrifice, thereby symbolizing that they too would be cut off should they violate the covenant. As a commentary I read says, "To walk between the carcasses is to submit oneself to the fate of the slaughtered animals as a penalty for covenant breaking." **God** would keep this covenant or die.*

God's promises to God's children are serious business. God stakes God's life on these covenants. And that is what Jesus is dealing with in our Gospel lesson. When these Pharisees come with warnings about Herod, Jesus has more important things on his mind. Here's the words from the Message Bible. *"... some Pharisees came up and said, "Run for your life! Herod's on the hunt. He's out to kill you!"*

*Jesus said, "**Tell that fox** that I've no time for him right now. Today and tomorrow I'm busy clearing out the demons and healing the sick; the third day I'm wrapping things up."* Jesus, God's Son, had some covenant keeping to do. He just didn't have time to waste on Herod's threats.

Jesus knew what he was up against and the only thing motivating him was a fierce love, a love like that **of a mother hen** for her chicks. Now mother hens are not what we'd classify as ferocious beasts, but what they do to protect their young is beyond courageous. When there is danger, like a storm, or a fox, the hen hovers over her brood, bringing them under her body with

her outstretched wings. She will not budge. She will die before she will retreat from danger for the sake of her chicks.

So I think we can see why Jesus didn't choose to liken himself to a mother bear, or an eagle, or a lion. These animals fight a furious fight using their claws, their talons, their jaws as weapons. Mother hens, have no weapon, except their strong love and their vulnerable bodies.

I can hear Jesus' anguish as he expresses his longings for God's children. "*How often I've longed to gather your children, gather your children like a hen, Her brood safe under her wings—*"

The problem is sometimes the **baby chicks** run away from their mother's safety. They don't listen. They don't understand where their safety is. That's what caused Jesus' grief. He is calling to Jerusalem. Jesus is saying he longs to protect them and he tells them, "*you were not willing!*"

As a mother, I get what Jesus is saying. Sometimes those little people you love so much just don't cooperate. **This** is my youngest daughter, Emily, when she was about three years old. She the one who just had a baby four weeks ago. I don't know is it wrong that I kind of hope little Clark, gives her some of the stuff she gave me? One day when she was about this age, I was telling her she couldn't do something that was not safe, I'm not really sure what it was, but I think it had to do with her going outside at the farm alone. In my motherly voice I said, "If you do that again I will have to punish you." She looked up at me with those big brown eyes, put her hands on her hips and said, "Do what you gotta do."

Man, I wanted to take her under my wing and protect her, but this little chick was not cooperating. I laugh now, but I did have a feeling of "now what am I going to do?" She probably was punished. She was punished several times throughout her life, but I was the mother hen and I protected her, whether she liked it or not. **She** had a baby four weeks ago. I'm pretty sure she understands, now. She's quite a mother hen to little Clark.

You see motherly protection has nothing to do with what the chicks want. It is all about a **vulnerable**, powerful love that nothing, even death will stop. It is unconditional and sacrificial.

I came across a story of a **young man** who grew up in South Korea. He and his mother were very poor. He was always embarrassed at their living conditions and he was especially embarrassed at his mother's appearance. She only had one eye. He was teased at school about his one-eyed mother and vowed that one day he'd get away from her and make something of himself.

Through his mother's hard work and saving every penny they had, he was able to go away to college and did make something of himself. He married and had a child of his own. One day he went back to his home town for a class reunion. He found his mother dying in her cold shack in his old neighborhood. After her death he found a letter to him from his mother. She expressed

how proud she was of him and disclosed a secret she kept from him all his life. It seems when he was very young he was in an accident in which he lost an eye. She gave one of her eyes to him so he would not grow up being teased and shunned.

Sacrificial love is what Jesus is talking about when he says he longs to love us with the love of a mother hen. Jesus gave his eyes; he gave his whole body for our sake. His vulnerable love is the ultimate picture of courage.

Jesus shows us that **God's wings** are always there for us, ready to protect us and love us, even in those times in our lives when we are so scared we don't know which way to go. This is God's covenant with us.

As we continue this Lenten Journey, opening our lives to God's Love, let's take a moment right now to think about what in our lives today, makes us feel the most vulnerable, frightened, out of control? It could be illness, a family problem, something at work... whatever it is, let's sit for a moment and rest under God's wings. Let's claim God's promise that we hear in our Psalm, that we will *"live in the house of the Lord all the days of [our] lives...For he will hide [us] in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal [us] under the cover of his tent..."*

Yes, it takes courage to be vulnerable. Jesus shows us that courageous love means **opening our hearts** to God and to each other. That is the kind of love God wants for us to spread all around, **right** here as we are gathered under God's big protective wings. Amen

