

Psalm 27

Luke 13:31-35

Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Irene Pak Lee

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## Under God's Wing

How many of you grew up going to church camp? If you grew up going to church and especially if you grew up going to church camp of any kind in the U.S., I am sure that represented among the generations here, there are certain camp songs you sang as a child that you still remember to this day. For example, if I started singing "Zacchaeus was a wee little man... (and a wee little man was he)... "he climbed up in a sycamore tree" (for the Lord he wanted to see)... I knew you all would pull through for me on that one. Most of the songs we sing at camp are fun and help us remember our Bible stories and they bring back good memories. These kinds of camp songs are still sung to this day with children and adults and of course new ones have come out that I did not even know about. For example, at the first church I served, they sang a song with the kids at camp called "Jesus is My Super Hero." It's a fun bopping song for kids, there are motions to it and basically the lyrics are "Jesus you're my super hero, you're my star, my best friend..." and then it goes into phrases like "better than Batman, better than Superman, better than Barbie, better than Yugioh"... and then I had to google "Yugioh" because I had no idea who or what that was. The kids loved it and I can see why. Aside from the fun tune and fun motions, it's comforting to think of Jesus as a superhero. Someone who protects us and could whoosh in to save us, stronger than all of the superheroes they see in the movies.

Maybe we need that kind of secure belief about Jesus and God when we are young, but I think sometimes what happens when this message is engrained into us at a young age is that when we become adults, we still believe that this is how God in Christ is supposed to function for us. When pain or crisis, fear or the simple reality of life hits us, usually our first response is to blame and to doubt God...and I think this is partly because deep down inside of us, even if we didn't grow up singing Jesus is my superhero, that's what we believe him to be and what we expect him to do when bad things happen. But is that what we should be expecting?

In our gospel lesson today, the passage we heard comes after a series of difficult to understand parables or analogies that Jesus shares about the mustard seed, the fig tree, yeast, and the narrow door. He has also healed a woman who could not stand up straight and calls people to repent. And after this series of healing and lessons begins our passage today where the Pharisees, leaders who have normally opposed Jesus in other parts of the gospel, come and warn him to leave quickly because Herod wants to kill him. Jesus is making waves and even his opponents are afraid for him.

To be honest, Jesus should be afraid. Not only because hearing that someone wants to harm you is frightening enough as it is, but because the person that is threatening it is someone who has a record of having no mercy and also has the power to do so quickly. It's the same Herod who beheaded John the Baptist. This is the same Herod for whom historical texts record his reign as ruthless and brutal-even having his own sons killed for who knows why.

But Jesus' response is totally unafraid. He's like a superhero in his response! He says, "Go and tell that fox for me, "Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work." I want to be like, "Yeah, Jesus! Go get it!" and give him a holy high five if that's appropriate. He's basically saying to Herod, "you can't stop me, I'm going to do what I do. I'm going to keep on going. I'm not afraid of you."

The phrase "fear not" or "do not be afraid" shows up over 100 times in scripture. And I share this fact because when people tell *me* not to be afraid, that does not usually help me have courage. But when I see someone demonstrate courage in the midst of fear, that is what inspires me to have courage. This is one of those moments. Seeing Jesus respond the way he does is inspiring. Jesus is my superhero.

But then, there's a shift. Jesus goes from being completely bold and unafraid in the face of Herod and his threats to another posture of grief and lament for the city and the people for whom he knows will turn on him. And instead of aligning himself with an image of a superhero or even just anything stronger, he aligns himself to a mother hen. A chicken, you all... and I'm not going to lie... I'm a little disappointed after this brave faceoff to Herod. Why a mother hen, out of all things?

Now I just want to take a second here to say that I do love that Jesus aligns himself with a feminine image. But if maternal power is what he is going for, then why doesn't he use some of the other images that are in the scriptures like a mama bear or a soaring mother eagle or even a laboring woman or midwife? Instead, he chooses a mother hen, which is an animal that I would not associate with any kind of power or strength ... and in his lament, this mother hen's children will not even come under her wings. I also think it's interesting that after calling Herod a fox, he chooses to align himself with a hen? Don't foxes kill hens?

But I think that's exactly the point Jesus is trying to make in using this imagery. You see, what grieves Jesus is not the fox. It's not Herod trying to kill him. What grieves Jesus is that those for whom God's wings are open wide refuse to enter in.

I had never really seen a mother hen gathering her brood before, and so I went online to watch some videos of this happening, and what struck me is that the hen uses her whole body to cover the chicks, but it places her in a very vulnerable position. She offers refuge right in the middle of perceived or real danger, and it was a beautiful image to see the brood gathered together under her wings. She is also pretty fierce to any threats that surround her.

But in watching this, I also noticed that if a fox really wanted to get the mother hen and the brood, it could. She is fierce to threats, but she's still a chicken. Not exactly an animal that we associate with strength and might. But maybe that's not the point in today's lesson. You might be wondering then what good this image is of God as Mother Hen if faith in her can't make us safe? Why can't we go with the superhero image instead? Why doesn't Jesus use something stronger?

You and I know that a life of faith and walking with God does not always mean protection from real and present danger. Believe you me, I do believe that it has protected me at times. But it does not always. Faith in God does not always bring us safety or protect us from bad things happening to us. Herods still exist. Foxes still exist. Danger still exists. And I read recently somewhere that danger is not optional, but fear is.

And so maybe this imagery of coming under God's wings, of God as a mother hen, is to help us to recognize that Jesus' vulnerability is our strength. This image of an open chest, wings stretched wide, longing to gather us in right there in the open and in the face of danger and offering us refuge in the middle of whatever it is that we fear ... it is a place of comfort, hope, love, and community.

Friends, maybe it's not safety that keeps us from being unafraid. Maybe it's love. And under God's wings, that's exactly what keeps us from being unafraid. The love that is offered there. Because this love does not seek to gather just one of us, but it seeks to gather ALL of us. Jesus says, "How often have I longed to gather you..." Jesus laments that the people refuse to be gathered under the loving embrace of God...a God who does not cower in the face of the Herods of this world and yet weeps for the children to come back under the wings of love.

And so Church, my question and challenge for you today is what will it take for you to be gathered under God's wings in this Lenten season? What will it take for you to be gathered under God's wings? Because doing so requires a return, a willingness to be united and together in the midst of threats and fear. It requires surrender. It means that we are willing to not go at it alone but to surrender to the community-to the body of Christ that is the church and to be gathered there.

What will it take for you to be gathered under God's wings? What part of your life is resisting it? Where in our lives have we chosen to go it alone, turning away messy human connection because it feels too risky, too time-consuming?

We may never sing camp songs about Jesus as a Mother Hen to our children, but the imagery is real and it is true. The reach of her wings is wide. Her body and heart are on the line and she longs for us, longs for you, to be gathered under her wings of love.

Friends, as we continue the journey together in this season of wilderness and transformation, I hope along the way, I'll get to connect with you in the wide embrace of God's love. Let's go with courage even in the midst of the danger. I'll see you under God's wings ... meet you there. Amen.