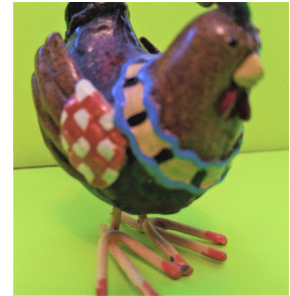


Philippians 3:17-4:1 Luke 13:31-35
“On mother hens”



There are many pictures of God in the scriptures - word pictures that help us "see" who God is. There are many stories recording the actions of God. One of the predominant themes this morning is that God is a covenant-maker and keeper.

Consider some of these covenants. There was the covenant in Eden with Adam and Eve which brought with it God's promise of redemption. There was the covenant with Noah guaranteeing the perpetuation of the human race. There was the covenant with Abraham granting a family, a people, a land, and blessings through the family and people and land. There was the Covenant with David promising that God would send the Messiah and bring salvation through the family of David. The Prophets spoke of a covenant in which God's word would be written in a person's heart.

Today's theme in Luke's gospel, underscores the lengths to which God will go to keep covenant with us. It shines a bright light on the sacrificial love of God.

The pharisees come to Jesus to warn him about Herod's threats, Herod's intentions to kill him. "You must get out of here and go somewhere else," they tell him. Jesus uses the threats to talk about his coming suffering and death. And he affirms that he will stay the course to which God has called him. Then, as he turns to look at his beloved Jerusalem, intense longing and sorrow flood his heart.

Using a most intriguing analogy, Jesus spoke of his love for his people. Jesus said his love for Jerusalem was like that of a mother hen.

Considering this picture, David Kaiser has written:

"Is God a chicken?

"Consider God. Then consider the mother hen.

"Can we think of God as a chicken? Few other images seem so far from the way we usually think of God.

"The chicken, scuttling about, squawking in awkward efforts to nurture and protect her scattered squalling peeping, awkward little chicks.

"An eagle at least has a certain majestic appeal. Perhaps a swan. Even a Canada goose seems to possess more dignity, or brains. Certainly more strength and size.

"The stork has a tradition of bringing good luck to the house on which it lands. A penguin can cope with deep dangerous cold. Even the tiny and fragile wren fills our mornings with song. The hummingbird can fly backwards.

"But the lowly hen? To suggest that as the image of God is so remarkable, undignified and unsettling that we hardly know what to do with it. If a hen is a metaphor of God, it is hard to imagine what kind of God that might point to."

What kind of God indeed!!

In this passage from Luke, Jesus called Herod a fox - a deadly enemy, as any farmer can tell us, of hens and chickens alike. It is no accident that immediately after calling Herod a "fox," Jesus describes himself as a mother hen trying to gather her chicks to protect them - a mother who would lay down her life for her children.

There is a story about a grass fire in a barnyard. It burned through the farm. Sadly, the

animals and birds simply didn't have time to rune.

When the fire had done it's worst, the farmer looked at the damage. There was a mother hen, its wings spread wide; its feathers black and burned. The hen was dead.

But when the farmer picked up the dead hen, our scampered her half dozen chicks. Just before the fire, she had gathered them under her in the face of danger. She gave her life to save them.

How often would I have gathered you together as a mother hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing." (Luke 13:34b)

Like Abram, we have been given lots of promises by our Lord. "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matthew 28:20). "Whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:35). "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). "I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you" (John 14:18). "Any who believe in me, though they die, yet shall they live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26).

How shall we respond to this aching, loving, self-sacrificing God? Paul implores us to remember who we are and whose we are. He urges us to consider that we are citizens of heaven. He makes the appeal that we put our faith in this all-loving, covenant-making, promise-keeping God. He calls us to believe in tomorrow, regardless of what may be happening today.

*May the promises of the Lord be your strength, for this day,
for our living and serving together, and for always. Amen.*