

As A Hen

Luke 13:31-35

May 13, 2018

First United Methodist Church, Lindstrom

(This is a manuscript prepared for sermon delivery and may not represent actual words spoken.)

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”

In going over my record of sermons preached, I have noticed that I have not preached too many Mother’s-Day-themed messages. None here. You know...Mother’s Day has occasionally coincided with Pentecost Sunday. So there is that. Today’s message will have a bit of a Mother’s Day flavor.

There are many great and tender mother and child stories in Scripture. There is the story of Hagar and Ishmael. You can read about that in Genesis. In Exodus we read about the birth of Moses and how his mother hid him for three months because the king of Egypt had ordered newborn Israelite boys to be killed. After three months—when she realized she could hide him no longer—she made a basket and put Moses in it and hid him in the reeds along the banks of the Nile.

How about the mother of James and John, two of the apostles? She came to Jesus with a request. She asked Jesus to allow her two boys to sit at his side—one on the right, the other on the left—in the kingdom. Hey...the request was not the most appropriate...but it was a mother just wanting the best for her children.

I like the story of Hannah. You can read about her in the first couple chapters of First Samuel. Hanna was married to a guy named Elkanah. Elkanah also had another wife. Her name was Pininnah. For the sake of this story, let’s call her Penny. It is easier. Penny was blessed with children. Hannah had none. Elkanah was a decent fella. He loved Hannah. He felt

badly for her because she had no children. Penny was not so nice. She poked fun at Hannah.

Hannah prayed that she would become a mom. She prayed to God, “O Lord Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life....” She prayed in her heart. Her lips moved, but no sound was heard because she was calling out with her heart. Eli the priest noticed this—her lips moving and all that—and thought Hannah was drunk. Hannah said to Eli, “Not so, my lord. I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord...I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.”

God heard that prayer—as God hears all prayers. In the course of time Hannah gave birth to a son. To this son was given the name Samuel. “Samuel” means “heard of God”. And Hannah kept her promise to God. After her son was weaned, she took him to Eli the priest. She said to Eli, “As surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord. I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord.” The second chapter of First Samuel is Hannah’s beautiful prayer.

Yeah. I like that story. Hannah. I know my mother prayed for me. There were times when she trusted me to God. There aren’t too many moms who have not prayed for their children...and trusted them to God...and asked God to watch over them.

My mother was a saint...in so many ways. I miss her on days like today. I remember. And when I remember, I remember some of the...well, those things that when I remember them, I kind of

smile a bit. Who didn't learn some of these lessons from their mom...and what mom among us did not teach some of these things? My mother honed my ability to reason. When I wanted to do something just because the rest of my friends were doing it, she said, "If all your friends jumped off the Empire State Building, would you jump too?" On more than one occasion, when I was doing something she thought might cause me harm, she would say, "If you break your leg, don't come running to me." So she also taught me humility because when I said that if I broke my leg I wouldn't be able to come running to her because I would have a broken leg, she would say, "Don't you go getting too big for your britches, young man." She tried to teach me patience. "Just wait until your father gets home." There were lessons in endurance. "You are going to sit there until you eat every last bite of your supper." Hope. "Just wait until you get older." Of course, there were valuable lessons in spirituality, "You better pray those grass stains come out of your pants."

We honor our moms today...their memory...also our wives and grandmothers.

We also honor God...who has been like a mother to us. Now...that may sound a bit foreign to our time and tradition shaped way of thinking. We most often think of God as Father. Jesus called God, "Abba, Father." But there are those places in Scripture where the love of God is likened to the love of a mother. We read of one such instance in our text.

Jesus looked over Jerusalem. He lamented. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing." This image of God gathering his children under his wings appears often in Scripture.

In the Psalms we read, "But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you."

In the fifty-seventh Psalm it is written, "Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me,

for in you my soul takes refuge, I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed."

Then there are the familiar words found in the ninety-first Psalm. "Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday."

God the mother hen. "Mother hen" has sometimes had this less than positive connotation. Mothers fussing over their children. Looking back, I kinda wish I had appreciated that more. The image of God fussing over us...I don't know...I think that is a wonderful picture. God so cares about us that God fusses over the details in our lives. The fussy God.

There are a couple of other things, though, I get out of this God-the-mother-hen image.

One, this shows us the unconditional nature of God's love...and God desires us even when we don't desire God. This is so neat, I think. We may run from God, but God keeps coming for us.

In our text, Jesus said he longed to gather the folks of Jerusalem under his wings. Note that he said he had often longed to gather them under his wings. Often. What was the response of the people? They were not willing. And who were these people? They were people who killed prophets and stoned others sent to them. Yet...Jesus longed to gather them under his wings.

God fusses over us. God runs after us. God wants to protect us. God wants to gather us. All of this is without condition.

Then, second, we need to do some running to God. God gathers us. We take refuge. Two actions there...God doing the gathering...we taking the refuge.

I don't know all that much about chickens. Just one more thing on the long list of things I don't know much about. So I had to do a little looking up of a thing or two. See, I thought I knew that in times of trouble a hen would run around and gather all her young under her wings. She may try, but it doesn't always work out.

In the face of imminent danger, three things could happen with the hen and her chicks. One or two of the young ones just might panic and freeze. Not good. Some of the youngsters will panic and run around. The mother hen will chase after them and try to gather them, but she might not get them all. But, then, some of the little ones will run to their mother, and they will duck under her outstretched wings.

God is our refuge and our fortress. God covers us with his feathers. Under God's wings we find refuge. We must run to God.

So today we honor the women in our lives...our moms. Mom...that person to whom the athlete always says hi when he/she is introduced before a game...that person to whom we went when we were hurting a little bit...that person who was willing to kiss the scrape and make it better.

We also look to God...our Father...and our Mother Hen. God loves us without condition. Turn to God. Run to God. Take refuge in God. God will gather you under his wings...where it is all better.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”