



Second Sunday in Lent

Sermon by Revd Sharmain James



Sunday 13 March 2022

READINGS

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

Jesus' longing heart

PRAYER: *God of Love - "You made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until it rests in you. I pray that in the written word and through the spoken word we may come to know the living God who gathers us to Himself.*

Longing is an intense desire for fulfilment. People yearn for a time gone by, perhaps when their family was still together. Or they long for a certain season, or place, or sound. Many people know what it's like to listen to a particular piece of music that, at a certain spot, makes them ache. All of us who live in this broken world carry painful memories of unmet desire, and unfulfilled dreams. We know what it is too long - and find no fulfilment for that longing.

Desire - longing - this is what is at the heart of the spiritual journey and of our relationship with God. God desires us. God longs for us and for every living thing that God has made. God longs for us with passion. In our gospel passage we hear of Jesus' longing too. Jesus is grieving over Jerusalem. The people of Jerusalem had a rocky relationship with God. God desired a relationship with them and wanted them to be a light to other nations so others could know God. But the people walked away from God, over and over again. And over and over again, God continually called them back by sending prophets to speak God's words. And as the passage says, Jerusalem responded by stoning and killing those prophets. Even Herod wants to kill Jesus, who was considered a prophet.

And what does Jesus say?

"O Jerusalem, I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.... but you were not willing...."

- ◆ Why is it that they, and now we, are not willing I wonder?
- ◆ What keeps us from gathering under his wings?
- ◆ What prevents us from responding to God's constant desire for us.

Jesus longs and grieves for his lost and wandering children. For the little ones who will not come home. For the city that will not welcome its saviour. For the multitudes who refuse to recognize the danger that awaits them. . He laments all the lost "chicks" out there and he wants them to come under the protection of his wings.

Think of that image. Hens are fiercely protective of their chicks. They will growl, shriek, puff out their feathers and peck at anyone that might get her chicks. What do the chicks do? They will often scatter, run away from those protective wings.

On this second Sunday in Lent, Luke's gospel invites us to contemplate Jesus as a mother hen whose chicks don't want her. Though she stands with her wings wide open, offering welcome, belonging, and shelter, her children refuse to come home to her. Her wings — her arms — are empty. This, is a mother in mourning.

In the verses before this heart-breaking description, a group of Pharisees warn Jesus to leave the area where he's teaching and healing, because Herod wants to kill him. Though Jesus knows full well that Herod's displeasure is nothing to mess with (Herod is, after all, the villain who ordered John the Baptist's arrest and beheading), he tells the Pharisees that he's not afraid of "that fox." I have work left to do, he tells them, and I won't be deterred by a bully. Jesus wasn't going to let Herod, or the Pharisees chase him away or cause his work to cease. At this point in the story, Jesus is heading towards Jerusalem. Jesus knows exactly what fate awaits him there, but he won't change course. He will not allow anyone to derail his plans.

The Pharisees' attempt to chase Jesus off only added to the sadness Jesus felt for God's children. He was coming to Jerusalem to fulfil a ministry that would offer salvation to all. But the closer he gets to it; the more people try to chase him away. When Jesus says in verse 32 that he will soon reach his goal, he is referring to the rescuing of all creation. What he gives is his own body, - his own life. Jesus is like a mother hen who puts himself in danger and offers us refuge there.

AND WHAT DO WE DO?

We often act like those chicks. We scatter. We hide. We resist. We flee. We go our own way. Yet, God continually seeks us out. The hen from heaven came to his own, but his own did not receive him. They would not repent. They would not believe. They would not receive the One who had come to save them. . It breaks Jesus' heart. Lent is a time to see ourselves as the people who contributed to Jesus' pain, as the ones for whose sins Jesus died.

- ◆ Jesus weeps for the world today. He weeps over countries who have chosen the way of war, the way of hatred, the way of enmities. What will remain of the war – will only be ruins.
- ◆ Jesus still weeps when those who should know better reject his invitation in favour of something else.
- ◆ He weeps when his Church becomes distracted from her mission.
- ◆ Jesus weeps when those he has made his own through Baptism and taught the deep truths of God in Sunday school and confirmation imagine that they've outgrown their need for their Saviour.

But the good news is that there is still time to repent and to return back to God.

Denise Thomas in a weekly magazine called "Journey with Jesus" offers us a stunning image of chicks snuggling under a mother hen's wings. She sees it as an image of gathering, of community, of intentional oneness. It requires a return. A surrender.

She asked the question - What in us is "not willing" to be gathered this Lent?

- ◆ Not willing to surrender to community?
- ◆ To the body which is the Church?
- ◆ To the people God has placed in our lives for our own growth and deepening?

Where in our lives have we chosen to go it alone,

And yet a yearning mother hen is the mother we belong to. She's the one weeping for us. She's the one calling us home, and the home she's calling us to is profoundly communal. Her body and her heart are on the line, and yet her desire is fixed on us. On all of us. She will never, ever stop calling us home. It's a glorious thing to be a chick under Jesus' wings.

- ◆ Are you willing to open yourself to God's desire for your life and the life of this parish?
- ◆ Are you willing to be gathered under the wings of the great mother hen and to encourage others to shelter there also?

Christ longs to gather us again in the shelter of his wings, in the warmth of the friendships we foster, in the compassion that we share with those in most need.

- ◆ Are you willing once again to embrace his invitation?

During this Lenten season of repentance and transformation, may the longing of Jesus become our longing, too.

Amen