

“THIS CHICK IS COVERED”

Pastor Becky Stephens

Text: Luke 13:31-35

Joe is a man in his late sixties. He still works hard at his job, and worries about the ebb and flow of money that comes in. It causes him to have many sleepless nights. But what really causes Joe to worry is his daughter and her children. His daughter is in and out of drug treatment programs, and long ago she left her three children with Joe and his wife. Now that his wife has passed away, it's only Joe. His daughter calls about twice a year. His daughter's oldest girl, Sarah, is around sixteen...and she's beginning to remind Joe of her mother.

One night, Sarah is about to leave the house on a date with her older boyfriend. Joe and Sarah have been arguing again. And Joe has been worrying about her, not knowing exactly what to do. He would do anything for her...anything to keep her from winding up with the same problems as her mother.

Then, a car is honking its horn out front. Joe is slumped down in his chair, exhausted from a fourteen hour day. Before Sarah steps through the screen door, Joe says, “Remember—curfew is 12 o'clock!” His granddaughter stops at the far end of the living room, turns, and says with a face that is half sneer, half smile, “I'd like to see you make me get home by twelve!!!” The screen door slams behind her and Joe knows she is right. He is powerless to make her do much of anything anymore.

One of our greatest images of Jesus is that He can do anything! Walk on water. Turn a couple fish and a few loaves into a feast for thousands. He can even raise the dead! Yes. Jesus can do anything! But one thing Jesus will not do is to make us love Him. Jesus will not control human will.

“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!”

Jesus will walk out of a tomb in a few days, but He won't walk into our hearts without permission!

I would imagine anyone who has loved someone deeply and knows that they can't shelter them from harm's way understands just a tiny bit the pain in Jesus' lament over Jerusalem. What pain it must cause our God when He watches His creatures go through the screen door saying, "I'd like to see you make me!"

God has blessed us with free-will, and God will not break that covenant. But Jesus is willing to do anything in order to get our attention!!! He even likens Himself to a hen in our Gospel Lesson for this morning.

To a chicken! Out of all the animals that Jesus could have chosen, a whole Noah's Ark full of biblical metaphors, Jesus chooses a chicken! He could have chosen the powerful eagle of the Book of Exodus, "I bore you on eagles' wings." And there's a cagey leopard prowling through the pages of Hosea. God is likened to a lion in other Scripture passages. But a chicken? What kind of chance is a hen going to have against the likes of a fox like Herod?

But a hen is an awesome metaphor indeed!!! In the ancient world fire was an ever-present danger. Without modern fire-fighting equipment it could easily get out of control. Roman writers during New Testament times speak graphically about fires in Rome's crowded streets and homes.

The summer of 64 brought a fire to Rome that lasted for a week and destroyed half the city!

And although the word "fire" doesn't occur in this passage, the powerful image Jesus uses here may well have had it in mind!

The fire, however, isn't in a city; it's in a barnyard. And fire is as terrifying to trapped animals as it is to people, if not more so. When a barnyard catches fire, the animals try to escape; but, if they can't some species have a way of protecting their young. A hen, for example, gathers her chicks under her wings to protect them.

There are stories of this: after a barnyard fire, those cleaning up have found a dead hen, scorched and blackened—with live chicks sheltering under her wings. She has literally given her life to save them!!!

This is, indeed, a very vivid picture of what Jesus longed to do for Jerusalem, and for everyone for that matter! But at the moment, all He could see were chicks scurrying off in all different directions, taking no notice of the smoke and flames...ignoring completely the Only One Who could save them. And this is what Jesus' death would be all about!

Some unusually friendly Pharisees warn Jesus this morning that Herod wants to kill Him.

No surprise there! Herod has already chopped off the head of John the Baptist at a wild party.

A chicken's head won't matter much. Put it on the chopping block and be done with all this squawking about peace and poor people. How annoying! Jesus probably bugged Herod like crazy!!!

But Jesus will not let Herod deter Him, "Tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.'" Jesus is going to go to Jerusalem and die, risking the threats of the fox, and taking on the role of the mother hen to the chickens faced with sudden danger! Jesus is the hen; we are the chicks.

Will we allow Christ to gather us up under His wings? In this world we live in, foxes have always had a certain allure over God's children. They may not be quite as bizarre and murderous as Herod, but foxes still slyly try and woo away our hearts! And if we do allow ourselves to be wooed away, well...the results are tragic!!!

Jesus can walk on water and raise the dead, but Jesus will not force us to love Him. He wants, more than anything, for us to accept His offer of love and salvation...but that still doesn't mean that we can't slam the door in His face...leaving ourselves defenseless against the many Herods waiting for us in the shadows. There can be no doubt, that one of the hardest things in the world is loving someone you know you cannot force to love you back.

So what does Jesus do? Amazingly, Jesus keeps offering the love of a mother hen. Jesus keeps spreading His wings. He has given His life on our behalf. And Jesus will follow us into the darkness we have chosen for ourselves, over and over again.

If we look closely at Jesus hanging on the Cross, His arms outstretched, the span of His reach on that wood may well begin to resemble the loving wings of a mother hen, who longs more than anything to gather up her chicks in a love that doesn't make sense but will change our hearts if we look long enough!!!

And even as Jesus hangs on that Cross, He will not make us love Him, but His desire for each and every one of us is always there. "how often I have longed to gather [you] together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings..." Jesus said that 2,000 years ago, and Jesus still says that today!!!

What would this underserved love mean to your life, to your family's life, to the life of this congregation, and to your own ministry and meaning if we would only come joyfully running to Him? We have a great Savior Who has died for sinners!

And as persons who live in our modern day Jerusalems, we are confronted by the One whom Herod thought of as a trouble maker. Jesus desires our will, our pride and our defiant control over our destiny. We need to decide whether we will welcome Jesus gladly, or just slam the door in Jesus' face! To come to Jesus is both the hardest and the greatest thing we'll ever do!!!

Is this chick covered? Are you covered under the wings of our Savior? Jesus beckons us to come to him. May it be so. Amen.