2nd Sunday in Lent
March 13, 2022
Luke 13:31-35
Pastor Ann Hultquist

Jesus is a chicken. Not as an adjective, but as a noun. A chicken. A mother hen, actually. If I asked you this morning, or if you asked your neighbor in the pew this morning to draw a picture of Jesus, what do you suppose it would be? A blonde-haired Jesus carrying a lamb? Maybe a lion (like Aslan in *The Chronicles of Narnia*) or the Lion of Judah from the prophets' imagination. A light or a door; Jesus knocking on a door, at the table for the Last Supper, or risen in an Easter garden. Would it occur to you to draw a chicken? Probably not…Like never, right?

There's been some romanticizing of chickens in the last few years, as suburban and urban 'farmers' have tried their hand at backyard coops. Some people just *love* their chickens, and there *are* some that have very striking feathers; but folks who grow up on farms will tell you the other side: about the smell inside a chicken coop and the sharp beaks of some hens as you try to gather eggs. My daughter's in-laws tried their hand at backyard chickens and slowly lost every single one to a neighborhood fox. They can make a whole lot of noise when threatened, but in the end, their feathers are no match for sharp teeth and claws.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem," says Jesus. "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing." If Jesus wanted to use an image from the animals in creation, wouldn't an eagle have been better? That's the picture many of us are drawn to, we even sang about it last week: "I will raise you up on eagle's wings…" Majestic, soaring, strong…But instead, Luke's Gospel invites us to picture something so very different: Jesus as a mother hen whose chicks don't want her. Though she stands with wings wide open, offering welcome, belonging, and shelter, her children will not come.

Several chapters before this heartbreaking description, Luke tells us that Jesus has "set his face toward Jerusalem" or "resolutely set out for Jerusalem," as one translation says. That's where the powerful, both the Roman and the religious,

have their base of operations. To choose to go there smacks of foolishness, doesn't it…or maybe an upside down strength. The Pharisees today warn Jesus to leave, because Herod wants to kill him. Surely Jesus is aware that Herod is no one to be messing with, and yet, he tells them that he's not afraid of "that fox," with claws and teeth. I have work left to do, Jesus says, and I won't be controlled by a bully.

The resolute Jesus, speaking, we might say 'truth to power,' is an image that is easier for us to see and even easier for us to like than a vulnerable chicken. Despite all of Jesus' teaching about the last being first, and the first last; about turning the other cheek and serving others, who do we root for, who do we admire? The first, the strong, the fighter, the driven, those who push and who never give up.

I was so struck by a few sentences from Tiger Woods' speech this past week for his Golf Hall of Fame induction. He spoke about the work ethic his father instilled in him and then said:
"If you don't go out there and put in the work, you don't go out and put in the effort, one, you're not going to get the results, but two, and more importantly, you don't deserve it. You need to earn it."

I suspect that right now there are many of us saying to ourselves, yes, yes, that's right…not realizing that is the exact *opposite* of the Gospel of Jesus. We are so quick to believe our worth comes from what we are able to do and achieve, what we must make happen, what we must earn; and not just simply from who we are.

Do you ever find yourself believing that? We are so sure that everything depends on us and that we need to prove how important or how worthy we are. It's exhausting. We judge others and measure *them* as less than. We measure ourselves against others, and judge *ourselves* as less-than. It's not too difficult to see how all of it leads to anguish in our own lives, wounds inflicted on ourselves and others. And how it leads to tragedy, such as people of all ages deciding life is no longer worth living; and to misery on the global stage--like a war waged to demonstrate power and strength.

And all the while Jesus grieves for us lost and wandering children.

It is a lamentation for all that *could be* in this broken, resistant world. And yet, Jesus doesn't abandon us, soaring off into the sky like a mighty eagle. Jesus stays with us, offering vulnerable love which is more powerful than what masquerades as power. Arms spread wide, heart exposed, making his very being into a place of refuge, love, and return for all God's children. *All* God's children--even for those who refuse to come…even for the foxes who would kill him. In the upside down, good news world of Jesus, God's love always wins.

"How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings…"

One author (Barbara Brown Taylor) reflected on a hen in her coop whom she loved: "She accepts all comers," she wrote. "No questions asked. She has never seen a chick she doesn't like. The baby cheeps. The hen doesn't move a feather. The baby cheeps again. The hen stays right where she is. The baby takes a few steps toward her. The hen lifts her soft wings: *Come to momma, honey."*