

Second Sunday of Lent  
Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27;  
Philippians 3:17 – 4:1; Luke 13:31-35  
February 28, 2010  
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Here's a trivia question. How many animals can you name that are mentioned the New Testament?

Let's look at the easy ones first:

Lamb/sheep - Lamb of God, Lost sheep

Donkey/foal – Palm Sunday, Good Shepherd

Fish – Miracle catch of fish

Camel – go through the eye of the needle

Birds of the air – Sermon on the Mount

Sparrows – two sold for a penny

Vipers – you brood of vipers

Fatted calf – Parable of prodigal son

Ox – pull out of hole on

Dogs – lick poor man's sores, Lazarus house

Goats – division of sheep and goats

Swine – drove off the cliff

Pigeons – sold in the temple

Wolves – send you out as sheep in the midst of –

Lions, horses, frogs – Revelation

Eagles – obscure, mentioned in Matthew

Lion – adversary prowls around like a roaring lion

Anymore? Would you have named fox and hen if you hadn't just heard them mentioned in the gospel for today?

Jesus said, "Go tell that fox for me...." He has seemingly little love for the Governor of Galilee. The use of fox here is obviously derogatory. Remember, this was the same Herod who ordered that John the Baptist's head to be brought to him on a platter. John was a relative and most likely a dear friend of Jesus.

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It was Herod's father, Herod, the Great, however, who ordered the soldiers to be sent to Bethlehem after Jesus' birth some 30 years earlier.

If Herod is a sly and crafty fox, up to no good, God and Jesus are like a mother hen. The contrast could hardly be greater. The fox in the hen house wants to wreak havoc and consume, whereas, the mother hen gathers and protects under her wings. The fox wants to take lives while the hen wishes to save lives, sometimes at the cost of her own.

Others cite examples of mother hens at night puffing out their breasts, standing defiantly to face the fox. In the morning, there were clusters of feathers here and there and little

chicks running around on their own. Witnesses after barnyard fires have found charred and blackened mother hens with live chicks still huddled together under her remains. The hen's instincts are not to run in the face of danger and threat but to stand pat and provide shelter at all costs to herself.

Jesus will not be tempted to quake and rethink his mission in the face of a possible threat from a ruling authority. Jesus takes his order from God alone. And his mission is to preserve and restore lives – “casting out demons and performing cures” and gathering God's brood under his wings.

In the New Testament there are many animals cited as I mentioned earlier, but only two are used to help us better comprehend the person of Jesus. In John's gospel, Jesus is the lamb of God, and here -- and also in Matthew -- Jesus compares himself to a mother hen.

Jesus is lamb and hen -- both domestic, vegetarian and used for consumption or production of wool and eggs. They are givers not takers and non-aggressive.

Who's in favor of “Jesus, the hen of God”? It would take awhile getting used to that. It doesn't roll off the tongue easily. Nonetheless, the hen can be a very helpful metaphor for both God and Jesus. For one thing, it is feminine and maternal. Jesus is clearly male, but Genesis tells us that “God created humankind in God's own image, male and female, God created them.” A male God has dominated the Biblical landscape because males have been in charge, but the feminine side of God is gaining traction.

Here Jesus clearly refers to himself as a hen who wishes to gather her chicks. It's not hard to hear in this passage the longing of God over centuries of Jewish history to succeed in pulling God's children all together under God's protective love.

The prophets were sent for this reason again and again, and the people rejected them. This lament over Jerusalem is heartfelt. We feel God's pain and distress, God's anguish over Jerusalem.

Jerusalem remains a divided city, torn apart by disparate loyalties, land claims, religious interpretations within Judaism and among Jews, Christians and Muslims. Philosophical and religious differences divide nearly everywhere these days.

Last Sunday, Chad Krouse spoke at adult education about his experience last summer of witnessing the realities of Pakistani Muslim immigrants and Brits living in England. They are not melding together easily as you might imagine. He spent time with English clergy and a Muslim woman who are colleagues at a cathedral seeking to bridge the distant shores. He used the metaphor of a “hotel” to describe the current situation. People live in the same building but only cross paths in the lobby.

This image of the hotel is not a far cry from how life even here in the United States is more and more being experienced. Our lives are compartmentalized by race, religion, politics and wealth. We are holing up with people like us and justifying why those

different from us are expendable. We are scattered and further scattering. Our collect uses another but similar word: “straying.” *O God, ...Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again....*

I believe that in times of threat and stress, families, communities and nations either unite with stronger bonds of concern for one another or divide and form groups with competing interests.

Chad said the church was trying to replace the hotel metaphor with “home,” specifically “home we build together.” The kingdom of God that Jesus preached, lived and died for is the Home God and all humankind build together. All who choose will gather together under the expansive wings of one God, and we won’t be quibbling there.

- I think of Noah’s Ark where all of creation’s varied diversity dwelt together.
- I think of the fish ball I saw on a nature program. When the sharks attack, the fish, which swim together in a “ball,” scatter for the moment but reunite as quickly as possible. Solitary fish are at far greater risk.
- I think of St. Paul writing to the Philippians and reminding them that they are first and foremost “citizen of heaven.”
- I think of this church trying to be a place where any and all can come and find Hope, Healing and Hospitality.

One of my new favorite hymns is in our Renew Hymnal – “Here in this Place” #14. We sang it to open our Celtic service last week.

The second part of each verse begins with the words, “Gather us in.”

*Gather us in, the lost and forsaken.*

*Gather us in, the blind and the lame.*

*Gather us in, the rich and the haughty.*

*Gather us in, the proud and the strong.*

*Gather us in, the meek and the lowly.*

The last verse goes like this:

*Gather us in and hold us forever,*

*Gather us in and make us your own;*

*Gather us in all peoples together,*

*Fire of love in our flesh and our bone.*