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Lent 2C
Peace, Seattle
February 28, 2010 epk
Luke 13:31-35

GOD'S LAMENT

It's the hardest part of raising children: watching them make choices we know are not in their best interests; choices that will cost them—and us, too—down the road.

When they're little, of course, a chief part of our job description involves protecting them from their own curiosity, from what we know could hurt them even though they haven't got a clue.

- So we put gates on staircases and store cleaners in inaccessible cupboards.
- We childproof cabinets and doors and outlets.
- We buy BPA-free sippy cups and buckle our babies in car seats…
- All the while feeding and clothing and holding them close…it's what love looks like!

And their job? Their job is to keep on exploring, keep on discovering their world: testing boundaries, pushing limits, learning how it all is put together. And so it becomes a kind of dance.

As they grow and mature, our role shifts. And now instead of protecting them from life's every day hazards our job becomes equipping them to negotiate those hazards, because we realize that if we keep doing it for them they'll never learn to do it for themselves.

So we teach them how to STOP–LOOK–AND LISTEN, and how to STOP–DROP–AND ROLL; we teach them how to ride a bike and then drive a car. And the dance gets more complicated as more and more they take charge of their own lives, while more and more we yield control—even (and this is the hard part) when it means watching them make poor decisions and live with the consequences.

But no matter how old they are, we still carry them at all their ages and stages of vulnerability and independence, in here (heart).

And when life throws a particularly onerous challenge their way, and our instincts to protect and hold are activated again, we feel the longing to gather them under the safety of our wings.

> JERUSALEM, JERUSALEM, THE CITY THAT KILLS THE PROPHETS AND STONES THOSE WHO ARE SENT TO IT! HOW OFTEN HAVE I DESIRED TO GATHER YOUR CHILDREN TOGETHER AS A HEN GATHERS HER BROOD UNDER HER WINGS, AND YOU WERE NOT WILLING![1]

If you have ever loved someone you could not protect, then you understand the depth of Jesus' lament,[2] which after all is God's own lament; a cry reverberating back through the centuries to humanity's origins and forward to our own.

Twice in Luke's gospel Jesus gives voice to this lament, first here in chapter 13, on his way to Jerusalem, and then once more (in chapter 19) when he stands at its very gates.

In both instances he sees what the chicks cannot: that there's a fox on the prowl, licking his lips as each step takes him closer to his target.

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[1] Luke 13:34
[2] Barbara Brown Taylor, *As a Hen Gathers Her Brood, The Christian Century*, February 25, 1986. Page 201.

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And this is the other message from Luke's gospel.
When some Pharisees come to Jesus with the news that Herod has it in for him Jesus doesn't flinch; he refuses to play it safe.

GO TELL THAT OLD VARMINT I HAVEN'T GOT TIME FOR HIS NONSENSE, Jesus says.
I'VE GOT WORK TO DO, AND THE PRESSURE TO GET IT DONE DRIVES ME MORE THAN ANY THREAT YOU CAN CONJURE UP.

There is a deeper narrative unfolding as he moves mile by mile toward Jerusalem, and none of the powers that be have got a clue.

Herod may be after him, but it's Jerusalem—the city with a long history of chewing up prophets and spitting them out—where Jesus will finally make his stand and meet his destiny! And, oh, what a destiny: rejection by the very religious leaders who ought to have known him, betrayal and abandonment by his closest friends, crucifixion at the hands of Rome's torture machine.

The choice he made, to set his face toward Jerusalem in spite of what awaits him there, was really made long ago, back in the wilderness, when Satan offered all the authority and glory the world could muster on a platter and Jesus refused.

How will Jesus rule?[3] Today he answers the question directly.

The way of the fox will always manifest itself in our world. But God's ultimate way with humankind, the way of the Lord's Messiah, is the way not of the fox but the hen.[4]

It makes no logical sense, this kind of self-sacrifice on the part of God with so much at stake. No sense at all. Unless, that is, the power at the heart of the universe is unleashed through that self-giving. And this is exactly what the gospel claims.[5]

We who bear Christ's name are called to believe and to trust that in his death we receive the truest possibility for transformation and for life.

The world, with its myriad predators striking with tooth and claw, is forever inventing new ways to intimidate, scatter and destroy. But the church, when it is faithful to its Savior, is all about gathering together.

Gathering the vulnerable, the weak, the defenseless, gathering the poor, the helpless, the little ones; gathering them all under the Savior's holy wings.

Amen.

[3] Frederick Niedner, *New Proclamation Year C*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003. P. 160.
[4] Ibid, p. 161.
[5] Barbara Brown Taylor, op. cit.