

Under the Wings **Luke 13:31-35**

Americans Love Eagles But Chicken?

There are two birds Americans like the most. Do you know what they are? One is the bald eagle, and the other is the chicken. Of course, people like them for different reasons. The bald eagle is America's national bird and people love it because of its beauty, strength, and independence. President John F. Kennedy wrote, "the fierce beauty and proud independence of this great bird aptly symbolizes the strength and freedom of America." Do you like the bald eagle?

The other bird that Americans like is chicken. On the night of the Super Bowl alone, Americans ate about 1.4 billion chicken wings and drumsticks. Every year, Americans consume 8 billion chickens.¹ Americans love chicken as much as we love eagles, though in a different sense. If you could be one of these birds, which would you want to be? I bet most of you would prefer to be an eagle, not a chicken. If someone says, "You are an eagle," you would say, "thank you." But if someone says, "you are a chicken!," your response would likely be a little aggressive to show that you are not a chicken.

If I ask you to draw a picture of Jesus, what would you draw? A shepherd holding a staff, a mighty lion roaring or an elegant and powerful eagle flying in the air. What about a chicken?

Jesus, the mother hen

In today's scripture, we find a somewhat odd self-description by Jesus. "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!" (v. 34) Jesus likened himself to a hen or a chicken. We often encourage young people to be like mighty eagles but we don't typically encourage them to emulate a chicken. Right? The issue is that we, Christians, are called to imitate our Christ and he described himself as a hen in today's scripture. What was Jesus thinking using the image of a hen? Luke's gospel invites us to contemplate this unconventional image of Jesus as a mother hen.

In the verses that precede this description of the mother hen, a group of Pharisees came to Jesus and warned him to leave the area where he was teaching and healing, because King Herod wanted to kill him. Herod was a vicious King who murdered anyone if they seemed to be a threat to his reign. He killed his own son because he viewed him as a threat to his throne. He executed John the Baptist because the prophet dared to speak the truth and now he was after Jesus. Some Pharisees heard about it and warned him to leave the town for his own safety. In other words, Jesus just received a death threat from one of the most powerful men of his time.

The reasonable response to this threat should be to leave the area immediately. But Jesus replied, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next

¹ <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/22287530/chicken-beef-factory-farming-plant-based-meats>

day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.” Herod often referred to himself as the lion that is powerful and fearsome, but Jesus mocked him by calling him a fox. Jesus was not afraid of him.

An interesting point is that then Jesus compared himself to a hen, longing to gather her chicks under her wing. While Herod might be a fox, a fox can still destroy a hen. If Jesus views himself mightier than Herod, why didn't he choose an animal that could defeat a fox? Since Jesus knew the Old Testaments, he could choose different metaphors like a fearless mother eagle caring for its young or an enraged she-bear or mighty Leviathan, a great sea monster. But Jesus chose a mother hen, not an eagle, not a bear, but a chicken.

Love, the Courage through a vulnerability

Debbie Thomas says this metaphor of the mother hen characterizes both courage and vulnerability. Jesus knew what lay ahead of him, a daunting and even frightening challenge, which is the way of the cross and death. But he refused to turn away from his mission but rather met it head on. This is courage that emerges only from a deep trust in God and a lifetime of practice. Jesus knew the suffering and challenges that awaited him, but he never turned away for our sakes. “To anticipate challenge and suffering and not back away is, by definition, to make oneself vulnerable for the sake of others.”

Mother hens gather their chicks under their wings when a predator like a fox approaches. What do they do? They swell with indignation, fear, and courage. They stand their ground, and they prepare to die if they have to, to protect their children tucked securely beneath their soft, vulnerable bodies. That's courage through vulnerability.

I believed everyone remembers the tragic gun violence that happened at the Sandy Hook School in 2012. After the school shooting, stories started to emerge about the heroism of the teachers. Vicki Soto was a teacher who loved helping children learn. Her many friends spoke of her enthusiasm for life, love for children, and what a good friend she was. When a gun-man entered her classroom and approached her students huddled together in a closet, she threw her body in front of them. Vicki took the bullets intended for her children and died at 27 years young. Story after story was told of other teachers who draped their bodies over the little bodies of their students, protecting them from what destruction might come. The teachers were vulnerable but they were also courageous. They made themselves vulnerable for the sake of their students. They knew what was coming but they refused to turn away. We know in our hearts that that is what love looks like. That's the love Christ showed us.

This is the meaning of the mother hen when Jesus described himself as the hen. This is what we need today. The Ukraine war seems to prove that the world is like a jungle. There are too many eagles that want to protect only their territory, only their interests, only their people with sharp claws by destroying and hurting others. So many people believe that more advanced weapons and a stronger army are necessary to keep the security and peace of their nations. Even we, Christians, are enticed to believe that we need to sharpen our claws to protect ourselves. But

what we really need today is not more eagles with sharp and mighty claws but the mother hens who make themselves vulnerable for the sake of others.

I bet most of you, if not all, have gone through the time of the Cold War. During that period, the Western Bloc and the Eastern Bloc competed in increasing their military might with personnel and weapons. Two great eagles and their allies engaged in the nuclear arms race and scientists warned the doomsday clock was getting closer to midnight. In 2022, the Doomsday Clock remains at 100 seconds to midnight. Sharpened claws cannot stop it. Violence and hatred never stop it. The only way to move the clock backward is love through courage and vulnerability for the sake of others. Only through the love that, Jesus Christ, the mother hen, showed us, can we make the world a better world.

Under the Wings

In face of global-scale violence and a war from a distance, we feel helpless and vulnerable. It seems that there is nothing we can do about it. But there are things we can do for the people of Ukraine and others in need. First, pray to God to shelter them under God's wings. As the mother hen, ask God to gather people in danger and cover them with a warm and soft body. Also, we are the church and the church is the body of Christ, the mother hen. United Methodists in and near Ukraine are helping refugees, providing food and temporary shelter. The Rev. Rares Calugar, superintendent of The United Methodist Church in Romania, said, to support refugees, "The UMC has built a network in the city with access to numerous apartments and houses where those leaving the community center can stay to make room for new arrivals." Through small local United Methodist churches in Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and Bulgaria, our Christ opens his wings and embraces those who are crying. The United Methodist Committee on Relief has already started to develop a channel to support Ukrainian refugees. So, I encourage you to pray for them and if you want to help them but don't know how, contribute through UMCOR. Our acts may seem small, powerless and insignificant compared to the urgency and immensity of the issue. But the love we share is greater than anything else. Also remember that Love is always stronger than death, and unto that love we return during this season of Lent.

In this Lenten season, I encourage you to dream to be a mother hen rather than an eagle. Be more vulnerable for the sake of others. Love courageously. Also, don't try to stand alone but take shelter under the wings of our mother hen, Jesus Christ, and may the peace of God dwell in you richly. Amen.