

St George's Anglican Church Malvern

Third Sunday in Lent Yr C

3 March 2013

Isaiah 55.1-9

Psalm 63.1-9

1 Corinthians 10.1-13

Luke 13. 31-35

I wonder when Jesus first saw it? I wonder when Jesus first watched a mother hen gather her chickens under her wings. Maybe there was a fire in Nazareth one day and a scorched hen was found with the chickens safe from the fire's effect. But it need not be so dramatic. Maybe he just noticed how the chickens his family and the neighbours kept ran to the hen whenever they felt under threat.

It's this image of a mother gathering and protecting her offspring that comes to mind when Jesus thinks about his coming to Jerusalem to speak peace to the city. That should now be a difficult thing to do. After all, the city was named for peace: Jeru-salem. It Salem, shalom is a Semitic word that means not just the peace that is the absence of war, but the peace that is the foundation of the well being of the whole community. The city's name implies the completeness of human that ultimately and only comes from God, the maker of all that is; God: the completion of all that is yet to be.

Jesus longs for Jerusalem to recognise him as the one God has sent to create peace by gathering all the people together in himself. As the letter to the Ephesians says, God sent Jesus 'to create in himself one new humanity... thus making peace. (Eph. 2.15) But Jesus was a shrewd observer of humanity. He was so insightful that some said he could see into human hearts. Jesus knew from the story of his people that Jerusalem stones the prophets of peace. It was a city long practiced in rejecting the paths that would lead to peace, trusting instead to this or that political alliance - and paying the heavy cost in human life and destruction that they will pay one more in 70AD at the hands of the Roman occupiers under whom Jesus lived his whole life.

As the city comes into view Jesus weeps to see its familiar walls, its beautiful Temple. He knows this city; he's been going there since childhood. He intuitively knows what is coming and feels (and is) powerless to change hearts that do not want to respond to God's initiative.

The image of the hen gathering the chickens under her wings is familiar to Jesus, not just from home life, but from the Hebrew scriptures, especially in the psalms. 'Hide me under the shadow of your wing', the psalmist prays (Ps 17.8) and 'in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, until the destroying storms pass by.' (Ps. 57.1) God is the mother bird, the one it is safe to rely upon, the one whose protection can be willingly received without diminishment until the future is clear and a new purpose embraced.

The great maternal desire in Jesus' heart is to be as God gathering us all into the safety and completeness of God's embrace. Parents know this impulse to protect their children and keep them close for as long as possible. Paradoxically, of course if you also allow your children freedom as they grow into young adults, they will seek your wings in all sorts of ways and your parent's heart will sing with the return and reward of a mature love from your adult children. Truth to tell, all good adults feel this way about children and vulnerable people. Good people feel this way about those who seek protection from violence in our communities; and those who flee to Australia seeking safety. Our community would be more secure if we lived at peace with the strangers in our midst instead of vilifying them or making them scapegoats.

Jesus knows that some will not seek peace, some will attack and some will abandon him. Eventually he will die alone. It does not deter him from doing what he believes he is called to do: speaking peace to the city - for peace is the desire of God's own heart.

This image of God as mother, which Jesus himself creates with his words, is one that should not surprise us, even if it is not a common image. God is both mother and father, and neither. Next Sunday we will explore the image of God as an infinitely patient father who risks all on a wasteful son and never ceases to look for the son's change of heart and return to his father.

Julian of Norwich, the 14thC mystic famously took up this same imagery of Jesus as a mother and discovered through her prayer that, 'God chose to be our mother in all things' and that 'just as our [earthly] mothers bear us for pain and for death, so Jesus our true mother bears us for joy and endless life. Julian's words are a canticle in the new English prayer book. (see below)

St Anselm, one time Archbishop of Canterbury, earlier in the 11th C also wrote a lovely canticle which is in the green prayer book for use in the daily offices of morning and evening prayer.

It is into this cradle of faith that Clementine and later this morning Annabel will be baptized today; into this peace that they will be received and into this life that each is born anew of the Spirit.

A Song of Christ's Goodness

Jesus, as a mother you gather your people to you:

you are gentle with us as a mother with her children.

Often you weep over our sins and our pride:

tenderly you draw us from hatred and judgement.

You comfort us in sorrow and bind up our wounds:

in sickness you nurse us
and with pure milk you feed us.

Jesus, by your dying,

we are born to new life:

by your anguish and labour
we come forth in joy.

Despair turns to hope through your sweet goodness:

through your gentleness, we find comfort in fear.

Your warmth gives life to the dead:

your touch makes sinners righteous.

Lord Jesus, in your mercy, heal us:

in your love and tenderness, remake us.

In your compassion, bring grace and forgiveness:

for the beauty of heaven, may your love prepare us.

Anselm of Canterbury

Colleen O'Reilly

A Song of True Motherhood

God chose to be our mother in all things:

and so made the foundation of his work,
most humbly and most pure,
in the Virgin's womb.

God, the perfect wisdom of all:

arrayed himself in this humble place.

Christ came in our poor flesh:

to share a mother's care.

Our mothers bear us for pain and for death:

our true mother, Jesus,
bears us for joy and endless life.

Christ carried us within him in love and travail:

until the full time of his passion.

And when all was completed

and he carried us so for joy:

still all this could not satisfy
the power of his wonderful love.

All that we owe is redeemed in truly loving God:

for the love of Christ works in us;
Christ is the one whom we love.

Based on Julian of Norwich