

Luke 13:31-35

I was watching a documentary the other day showing hungry wolves looking for a meal. A herd of buffalo had surrounded their young calves, and whenever the wolves attempted to get to a calf, a large buffalo would send it flying with a butt from its giant head, or make it yelp in pain by stepping on the wolf with its large hooves. The only way the wolves could succeed was to get the herd running. On the run, the calves could not be protected as easily, and sure enough, one of the wolves was able, as they were running along, to get a calf away from its mother.

I begin with an animal story because today's text is about animals. Not wolves and buffalo; a mother hen and her baby chicks, and a fox. Now we all know that the fox is the mortal enemy of the chicken. If a fox sneaks into the henhouse, it spells disaster for the chickens. But foxes are not the only enemies chickens have. Hawks and snakes love the taste of chicken almost as much as we do. Jesus called Herod a fox, and He called Himself a mother hen. Some Pharisees told Jesus that the fox was looking for a meal and that He had better start running. "*Get away from here,*" they told Jesus, "*for Herod wants to kill you.*" Now that trick may work with buffalo herds, but it will not work with Jesus. No fox is about to send Jesus running away from His brood of chicks. "*Go tell that fox,*" Jesus said, "*Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish My course...for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.*" He was staying put. So the fox was on the hunt. Jesus was not about to plan His escape. He would keep doing what He came to do--protect His brood of chicks.

Now that should make us feel good because you and I are the chicks. We're defenseless. A baby chick away from its mother is a meal waiting for a mouth to devour it. A hawk could swoop down and snatch it. A snake could lunge at it and gulp it down. A fox would have no trouble at all finding it and eating it. Baby chicks are so helpless that they can even drown in their own drinking water. There is nothing about a baby chick that sends the message: strong, independent, self-sufficient.

And the chicks know this. By nature they come running to their mother when danger is near. No baby chick will ever stand up to a predator. This is why the mother hen opens her wings to gather together all her chicks. She lifts her wings and they come running and huddle close to her. And quite often she has to nudge them in. They do not always recognize danger, but she does. And so she will draw them in under her wings even when they don't know why.

You may not know why you are here today. It may be a habit for you to come on Sundays. It may be that you're here on a whim. You surprised your family. You surprised yourself by coming. I'll tell you why you're here. Jesus opened His wings and gathered you in. You are precious to Him. He does not abandon you to your spiritual predators--to all the foxes, and hawks, and snakes out there. He draws you under His wing.

And you know you're safe, don't you? You know this is where you need to be. We are not here for Jesus. The mother hen does not need her chicks, but they need her. Singing the hymns and the liturgy, hearing the words of Scripture, listening to the sermon...no Christian will say: "I've got to get out of here! This place is not safe for me!" Just like no chick would panic under the wing of its mother and say: "I don't feel safe here with my mother. I've got to get out!" The chick knows that under the sheltering wing of its mother is where it needs to be.

This is why you parents bring your babies to Holy Baptism. In baptism you are placing your child next to Jesus under the safety of His sheltering wing. This is why you read the Bible stories to your

young children in your home and talk with them about Jesus' love for them. This is why you bring them to Sunday School. It's why you bring them to church. It's why you enroll them in Catechism Class. And it's why you pray with them and for them daily. A baby chick needs above all to be placed under the wing of its mother hen--because we keep leaving that place of safety. We walk out from under His wing right into trouble. Not once, or twice. Day after day we do this. And not just when we're young children. You know, as well as I, many young adults, and older adults--many of whom we love very much--who are hardly ever found here in the shelter under Jesus' wing.

And if this brings a tear to your eye, look at Jesus, at His emotions when He cried the words: "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!*" It's not Jesus who drives His precious chicks away. It's our own sinful wills that do this. We would rather spread our own wings than be nurtured in safety within Jesus' wing. These three words are the only words which need to be spoken by the King on Judgment Day to those who will perish..."*You would not!*" The King gave Himself for them. He sought them and found them. He invited them again and again. 'I did everything for you,' He could say to them, 'but "*You would not!*"' 'I loved you...but "*you would not!*"'

You are here today under Jesus' wing not because you are better than the rest. It's not because you are better people, better Christians than those who will not come. You are here because Jesus has drawn you here. And I want you to see that here is where you and I need to be, not just today, but every time Jesus opens His wings for you to come and huddle next to Him. He calls Himself a mother hen, your mother hen. And maybe you know this...a mother hen will protect her chicks by doing whatever she needs to do, even dying for them.

I read a story once that touched me deeply. There had been a fire in the henhouse. The firemen arrived, but it was too late to save the chickens. Later that day the farmer was walking through the debris and spotted a mother hen sitting on the floor of the burned out building. She had been burned to a crisp--head, feathers, everything. The farmer picked her up, and to his surprise there were her baby chicks, all of them. They were scared but alive. They survived the fire because their mother drew them under her wings. She kept them safe even though she died in the fire.

Jesus did this for you. He did not run when the fires of hell came. He would not leave you. You know what He did...He spread His wings on a cross and He was burned to a crisp. Death took Him. Hell devoured Him. But look...you are safe. Under His wings, under the shelter of His cross we find His baby chicks. And maybe we're scared...because we have often left Him even though He will not leave us. We're scared because we know that fire was meant for us. We're sinful chicks who often will not...will not come to Jesus' wings, will not allow His love to change us and shape us. But look at Jesus who was burned by the fires for you, and now lives again. He is not angry. He forgives you. He has always forgiven you. And he forgives you now as well. He is your mother hen. His wings are spread open for you. And you are safe. Safe and forgiven here with Him. Amen.