

The Rev. Patricia Rose
Second Sunday in Lent
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
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As a Hen Gathers Her Brood Under Her Wing

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you.”

With these words in Luke's gospel today, Jesus is offering a powerful articulation of divine love - including God's powerful longing for us to know and to become all that we have been given to be.

This sacred longing that resides in trust, offering grace, but never forcing itself on us. It is our choice to engage the invitation, or not. Jesus is speaking to the people of Jerusalem, but of course he is also speaking to us. The words and metaphor seem simple, rustic even, a hen with her brood, willingness, a house that is left to us.

But the words are filled with rich layers that point us to profound depths of what is. The passage starts with an ominous death threat to Jesus, from Herod, the ruler of Galilee. Jesus responds without becoming distracted from the core of what he is about. You tell that fox, he asserts, that I'm going to continue to do the work of healing people. Then, in a foreshadowing, he says that he must go to Jerusalem – “the city” he says, “that kills prophets.”

This brings him to this lament about Jerusalem – but not just about Jerusalem, but about humanity. Jesus is speaking of his deep heartbreak for those who choose not to respond to the divine invitation to become all that we are created to be. Genesis 1: 2 offers the image of *that Spirit of God that hovered over the face of the deep, when the earth was without form and void.*

This incomprehensible creative force that birthed all of this into existence, that birthed us into existence, hovers over us with tender loving longing to gather us under wings of love, for our incubation to hatch into what we are. It's a place of deep tender care and shelter that is being offered, just as out pictured by mother birds, a great force of love arising out of life itself - tireless, expecting nothing in return, unrelenting, focused, pure, inviting. “How I have wished to gather you all as a hen gathers her brood, but you were not willing.”

The catch for us humans, is that in God's perfect love, we are not forced but invited. We are free. We are free to love. We are free to follow the Truth. It takes a lot to be fully willing.

We are blessed with this holy season of Lent to take the time to examine what obstacles are in the way of our willingness, in the way of our Yes to God's invitation. Yes to follow Christ into the way of radical love. It's not easy and the cost is high. It's not easy to see things in new ways - to first of all *acknowledge* the old ways we cling to - even that starts with a willingness to see them.

It's not easy to examine our habits and defenses, we're prone to chiding judgement. But we can look at ourselves with deep compassion and deep honesty to see what's there, what we may not need, what may not serve us. That frees us. It's not easy though, to notice when we are unkind or disrespectful to others and we justify it. They deserved it.

It's not easy to wonder if all our preferences are necessary, or just comfortable. It's not easy to notice when we are envious for the achievements and good fortune of others, and not joyous. Not easy to forgive ourselves, to see ourselves as God sees us, as adorable and precious, as full of miraculous potential in and with God.

It's not easy to do **everything** we can to nurture that potential with God, into our flourishing. This brings us to the last line of what Jesus says:

See, your house is left to you.

The house, for the people of Jerusalem is the temple. The temple for them and for all of us represents the center point of the holy, the ground, the abode of the holy, where the fine, downy soft feathers of God's love hold us tenderly in the Truth. And where is that temple? In 1st Corinthians, we are asked: *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?*

In today's psalm we heard:

*5 One thing have I asked of the Lord;
one thing I seek;
that I may dwell in the house of God all the days of my life;*

*6 To behold the fair beauty of God
and to seek God in God's temple.*

*7 For in the day of trouble God keeps me safe
in the shelter of God;*

*8 Even now God lifts up my head
above my enemies round about me.*

*9 Therefore I will make an offering in God's dwelling, an oblation
with sounds of great gladness;
I will sing and make music to the Lord.*

Maybe the most influential enemies round about us, are the obstacles to our being willing to dive in with all our hearts and minds and strength and being. And perhaps in this temple of God in which we live and move and have our being, the offering, the oblation we can make is our whole lives, our whole unique being as we are sloppy and messy and rustic and sometimes clueless and making mistakes and saying stupid things and as beloved temples with the capacity to radiate love and imagine wonders, share the peace, be witness of God, and sing and make music to the God who celebrates and loves us.

This is what we can choose to do in our lives. It's not easy, not always comfortable, but we have been given all we need to choose it, to be willing.