



SERMONS THAT WORK

Lent 2 (C)

Comfort

[RCL] Genesis 15:1-12,17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 13:31-35

These days, there is no shortage of material when it comes to difficult news. News of an ongoing pandemic. News of violence, oppression, and communities pitted against one another. News of death and loss – not to mention the difficult moments in our personal lives. We are also facing our own personal losses and fears within our own communities. In fact, this week is around the time that COVID-19 first disrupted our lives. *It's been two years.* We are entering the third year of it. *Who's tired?*

The words in Psalm 27 today are comforting. They say, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?” and “though war should rise up against me, yet will I put my trust in him.” These words are about trusting God and not being afraid. The irony is that among all the difficult news we have been bombarded with, it has been really easy to be afraid. Is it that we lack faith if we are afraid? Is fear a sign that we are not trusting God enough? Elsewhere in scripture, God commands us to not be afraid. Perhaps these reminders to not be afraid are not to shame us when we are, but to recognize that, just like us, people in the Bible had moments when they were afraid. They longed to be comforted too. God is with us not just in our grand declarations of faith, but also when we are afraid. This psalm, for good reason, is a favorite because it is one to turn to when fear rears its ugly head. It is a psalm that longs for the days of “[dwelling] in the house of the Lord,” “sounds of great gladness,” and “[seeing] the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.” It is a psalm of comfort. It is a psalm seeking the balm in Gilead.

This Lenten season is a perfect time to be seeking *the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living*. In fact, the last few years, we have been surrounded by death in very acute ways. The priest says to us, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return” while placing ashes in the shape of a cross on our foreheads. Lent does not shy away from the harder things of this life; when we are reminded of our own mortality, we are also reminded of the life we have yet to live. No matter how much time we have left, at least for today, we are alive and we are breathing. The breath in our lungs is a gift.

The society that we live in does not like to be reminded of death. Talk about death is often hushed or accompanied with uncomfortable laughter. We hide away people who are dying in nursing homes or hospitals, obscured from day-to-day life. But death *is part of life*.

The goodness of the Lord is still present, even in times of great trouble – perhaps especially in times of great trouble. The psalmist asks, “What if I had not believed that I should see the goodness of the Lord in the land

of the living?” How different our lives would be if we did not believe in that goodness! The implication of this is that if we believe that we will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, then we’ll look for it. That goodness is not just at the end of days when God makes all things right, but in the present moment, too. It’s all around us if we only slow down and pay attention. I suspect you might know this to be true — especially in the hardship of the last few years.

The image that our Gospel lesson gives us today is that of God as a mother hen. Compared to other metaphors of God in the Bible — shepherd, potter, bread of life, and father, the hen is quite different. There is something very ordinary – and yet profound – about a mother hen. Once a hen hatches her eggs, her priority shifts from self-preservation to protecting her babies. She goes from an individual mindset to a communal one. In order to communicate with them, she will also develop a language that only her chicks can understand. Themes of protection and safety are all over this metaphor. And it’s worth noting that mother hens can be quite fierce if their babies are in danger. If you are a parent, you know you would do anything to protect your children.

A mother never forgets her children. Even if they forget her or choose to go on a different path. She will not turn her face from them. One of the hardest things a mother goes through is seeing her child in pain. Likewise, God mourns when God’s children suffer. In this Gospel passage, God desires to gather God’s children together as a hen gather her brood under her wings. This image is in response to death threats from King Herod. As violence begets violence, it would be easy to counter Herod with an image or metaphor that is violent. Or even one that is overly masculine. Yet, God does not do that. The response to acts of violence and abuse? A mother hen gathering her children. Protecting them and keeping them safe. That is the desire of our God.

There is nothing weak about the mother hen; she demonstrates boldness, compassion, and the willingness to do whatever it takes to protect those whom she loves. Not much can get in the way of a powerful and determined mother. “Prepare the way of the hen!” we may say to ourselves when we have reached a point where we are not sure we can go on much longer. Perhaps we are not as self-sufficient or courageous as we had hoped. Sometimes we need someone to advocate for us.

The invitation this Lent is to carry the image of Jesus as a mother hen with us as we travel. This does not ignore the realities of the dangers up ahead, but it does give us something to hold onto when we are afraid. How we long to be gathered under those wings! Much like those comforting words from Psalm 27, knowing that God is with us at every twist and turn can make a world of a difference — even and especially in these difficult times.

There is power in the loving care of God. Amen.

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