

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT – 21 February 2016
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Duluth, MN
Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Ps 27; Luke 13:31-35

“How often have I desired,” Jesus says, “to gather you together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.” These past days we have witnessed the truth of these words to us, and the reality that *God’s wings have many feathers*. How many hugs we received, how many expressions of prayer and support.

In the early morning hours for those arriving in shock and disbelief at the horrific scene, it was not words but an embrace that was the first greeting - *God’s embrace*, and *God’s tears*. Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem here in our text is memorialized on the Mount of Olives in a small chapel known as *Dominus Flevit*. It means, “the Lord weeps” in Latin, and the building was actually designed in the shape of a teardrop by an Italian architect. It is a testament to the God who in Jesus Christ is not unmoved by the suffering of his people but *weeps for them and with them*, as he wept with Mary and Martha at the loss of their brother, and as he did in our loss of what one of our altar guild members said was like her best friend. “Our six year-old is crying,” a member posted after seeing footage. “Tears are being shed today over this tragic fire” a friend from our Russian companion synod team texted. Countless Facebook emoji expressing sadness, and emails for courage and strength – the Lord weeps. And in the body of Christ, when one suffers all suffer together – and *the whole body is embraced*, through prayers from congregations, bishops, seminaries, and outdoor ministries, across thousands of miles and across this city. Cups of coffee, a warm coat, food, immediate offers for space and support – and not only from Christian churches but from both Jewish and Muslim faith communities.

God’s wings have many feathers. And in the spirit of combining reflections with singing, which we started at the vigil, I’d like us to sing the first verse of Thy Holy Wings, # 613, after which I’ll continue. “*Thy holy wings, O Savior, spread gently over me and let me rest securely through good and ill in thee. Oh be my strength and portion, my rock and hiding place, and let my every moment be lived within thy grace.*”

This is God’s embrace and it is *God’s embrace of us first that enables us to reach out and embrace others*. It was not I but another pastor who prayed first that early morning with his arm around me, asking our heavenly Father, for Jesus sake, to come to the aid of his children, a prayer that helped me rely on the Spirit that gives us words to say when we have no words. It was another pastor who wrote, “How well the psalm for Sunday tells us God’s wrapping around us in what can feel the worst of times.” Verse 5 of Psalm 27: “*In the day of trouble, God will give me shelter.*” “Even without your precious sanctuary to be in for awhile,” she wrote, “God shelters you and gives you the deepest meaning of home.”

How much that resonated with me when I came to see Pr. Carolyn here at Faith, seeing the same sign on the doors you saw this morning even before entering, “Welcome Gloria Dei!” It brought back the memory of what Prime Minister Trudeau said when a plane of refugees from Syria arrived in Canada. No one wants to be needy in a culture of self-reliance, but when we have experienced how humbling and abundantly gracious God’s embrace is in our own need, *how can we not embrace others with the same loving arms?* Someone messaged Gloria Dei directly on Facebook saying they had been part of Together for Youth, a support group for gay and transgender teens that has met weekly at Gloria Dei for a couple decades. He said, “You folks saved my life 17 years ago. I’m devastated by what has happened and would like to do all I can to aid in the reconstruction.” “In the day of trouble, God will give me shelter.” It is the Lord who can meet us where we are and enable our solidarity with all who have no home.

This is the fundamental difference between *fox power and hen power* – violent power that kills and stones prophets, grasping power of the Herods and the takers of this world on the one hand, and on the other the power of Jesus, the power of self-giving love. Even on Thursday evening as we gathered, another vigil was in solidarity with us and we with them as they prayed for an end to gun violence, recalling the shooting that claimed the lives of nine parishioners at Emanuel AME church in South Carolina last year. Reminding us, too, of yet other needs and griefs in the world, the depths of Jesus’ lament for all, and the importance of our ministry together in his name. But there’s a *risk that comes with hen power*. For the mother hen who is gathering her brood will not come away unscathed. Indeed, Jesus is prepared to stretch his wings out over his children even if it means doing so on the cross. And we too cannot be unchanged by such an embrace.

Some scholars link this *brooding* to the action of the Spirit that hovered over the waters at creation in Genesis. That Jesus’ image of the hen brooding is an echo of God “brooding” over the waters of creation, foreshadowing a *new creation* that is coming, the *labor of God* bringing forth something new – new life, new hope. Watching smoke billowing out from the broken windows, overwhelmed with the whole range of emotions at a sanctuary strewn with ashes, it’s hard to see that new life now. It was for Abraham and Sarah too as they were uprooted and began their sojourn. Yet the Lord says, “Do not be afraid, I am your shield, your protector and provider on this journey.” And when Abram responds with different worries of having no child, no heir, no land, nothing visible to show for God’s promises, the same Spirit brooding at creation now puts her wings around Abram and asks him *to dream a new creation*. To look at the heavens, to think of all his descendants, all the generations who will follow him.

And so we do too, think today, not only on those whose faith built a structure for God’s mission in the heart of the city that has been a vehicle for our ministry, we also think of generations who will come after us. We think of those who will continue to hear the gospel proclaimed in word and deed, those who will come to the waters of baptism and the Lord’s table, those whose faith will be planted and tended to participate in God’s mission of self-giving love for the life of the world. Jim Sjolie, Gloria Dei member who headed up much of the renovation work ten years ago, liked to quote a verse from Haggai 2:9, “The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former.” In some ways it’s meaningless to compare, for we were blessed with such a unique worship space full of memory and beauty. But Jim was also quick to talk about how the word “house” in the prophets means God’s people, and the renewing of God’s house means the renewing of ministry.

Indeed that is Jesus’ concern here, too. He knows he’ll get to Jerusalem, but there’s plenty to do before then, demons to cast out, people to heal. *Jesus gets on with his ministry and so will we*, but only through the Lord whose faithfulness sustains us on this journey, gathering her brood, enabling God’s work to continue through new relationships of hospitality and spaces that also have unique history and memory. How grateful we are to God for the gracious embrace we share with you and the communion of saints across all times and borders. An embrace that emboldens us to dream and act with renewed faith in God’s mission. God’s wings have many feathers, holding us in solidarity and enabling us to rise again. Amen.

Pastor David M. Carlson
2.21.16