**March 17, 2019**

**Luke 13:1-3, 31-35**

Jesus had a particular context for his ministry that is especially apparent in today’s Gospel reading: Jesus was a Jewish man who grew up in the Jewish Temple. He was from a working class family, but grew up to be a teacher or “Rabbi.” Moving away from his family’s workshop, he garnered some amount of fame within the Jewish community. People knew who he was. They valued his opinion and insight, seeking out his thoughts about scripture and ancient teachings. Despite his educated and righteous position, many called him a rebel and rabble rouser. Jesus caused a commotion and stirred up crowds wherever he went. He attracted crowds by what he taught – faithful living that flew in the face of Jewish Orthodoxy. He drew strangers and outcasts to him through healings and feedings. Although he never called for people to abandon the Temple or stand up to authorities, he was seen as an influencer – perhaps for the wrong reasons to the wrong people. Jesus created instability in an already fragile social culture (according to the authorities).

In the best of times, the leader of instability is cause for curiosity. In the best of times, instability safely plays on the sidelines and is monitored without much anxiety. But in the worst of times – in an already troubled and unstable society – the leaders of instability become a major public crisis. They are ostracized by those in their own group who “just want to keep their heads down.” Most people hope for the crisis to pass and that everyone can go back to living their normal everyday lives. People don’t want to attract the police or government’s attention, but the leaders of instability draw the attention of whoever is in power; the powerful want to keep their power; they want to control the power; the powerful will do whatever it takes to keep power away from leaders of opposing factions. The powerful want to remove possibilities for insurrection. Leaders of instability thus become targets for police crack-downs. These leaders are vulnerable to punishment themselves (often imprisonment to get them out of eyesight and earshot), or punishment onto those guilty of association by proximity or shared social groups, or even innocent bystanders. It wouldn’t be the first – or the last – time in world history. From Queen Elizabeth I’s purging of Catholic leadership in England to the United States’ government’s sanctioned oppression of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr’s civil rights groups to the Middle Eastern “Arab Spring,” this is a common cycle between powerful officials and unsanctioned social leaders.

Jesus was an unsanctioned leader. He left a wake of instability wherever he went. And that was trouble for a lot of people. Jesus was part of a minority group within a minority group – a Jew who was slowly forming a separate group of mostly-Jewish people and social outcasts. And that was trouble for the officials. The Jewish people lived in a place that was historically their own, but was under siege by foreigners. They were governed by Rome. Roman soldiers and government officials (like Pilate and Herod) were invaders with great power. It was their job to maintain order in a place that wasn’t their home. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were martyred and murdered during this 300-year period. No one trusted anyone else. Any small thing threatened the balance of power. Every small thing was suspicious. To say that tensions were high between the two groups is an understatement.

Enter Jesus.

Jesus wasn’t interested in maintaining order – in the civic or religious political worlds. Jesus was not there to follow someone else’s orders. He was there to establish a new order. He was there to topple the former ways and rulers, and display God’s kingdom order and rule. He spent time in the Temple. He spent time with the people. He walked and talked and listened and prayed and tried and tried to help people understand. Yet people didn’t listen. They didn’t understand. They were blinded by their own histories and relationships and ways of doing things.

Jesus said to the Jewish leaders here, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem – the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! how often have I desired to gather you up as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings… but you were not willing!”

Jesus saw the threat of that fox, Herod, but his children did not. The Jewish leaders were in crisis management mode, trying to minimize whatever damage was being caused, trying to keep things orderly and under control. Jesus longed to protect them from the things that would take their life – whether that was danger within their own community or beyond. To do so required them to relinquish control… The situation was literally life or death. Their everyday living was at risk of disappearing (as it indeed would in 70 AD, 30-40 years after this very scene)… The Jewish people needed a fierce protector and savior. They expected a warrior. But Jesus did not come to bring a sword (by his own admission). The Savior God sent was not the Lion of Judah. God sent a worrisome, pecking, faithful mother hen as Savior.

A hen sitting with her wings open, breast exposed, is in a vulnerable position. She is not ready to run. Her feet cannot take her away or kick at whatever might threaten from above. Her head and breast are vulnerable to whatever comes, potentially losing in her own life in a breath or swipe. But she isn’t concerned for herself. A hen resting in this position is thinking only of her little ones. She is protecting the tender life growing underneath.

As we draw nearer to Good Friday, as we stand beneath that horrible cross on Good Friday, imagine Jesus with his arms outstretched on the cross, taking us all under his care. He will die in order that we might have life. Even in this passage, he knows his death is coming and he literally and metaphorically walks towards that vulnerable position. Imagine yourself standing at the foot of the cross, sheltered from death and evil by this divine presence of Mercy and Love. Imagine yourself forever safe and warm in Christ’s eternal presence, even while knowing that *he* will not be safe and warm. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem – how often have I desired to gather you up as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings… but you were not willing!”

To be under the care of someone else requires great trust. To let someone love you and provide for all your needs requires a surrender of control. Being cared for by Jesus will lead to some amount of trouble. Being part of Jesus’ flock (or brood!) will turn some things upside down – in your life and in the life of the world. Are you willing this Lenten season to let Jesus gather you up under his wings? Are you willing to receive his merciful sacrifice? He is willing, but are **you**? Am I? Are we?