“God’s Love is Like a Mother Hen’s”  
*(First in a 5-part series on God’s Love.)*  
Sunday, February 24, 2013  
The Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas, preaching

Scripture. Prayer.

**Opening.**

Lent is a good time to remember just how high and deep and wide is God’s great love for you. Lent is a season in which, for 40 days, Christians give special attention to going deeper in their spiritual lives. In this way, we prepare ourselves for the remembrance of Jesus’ last supper on Holy Thursday, his death on Good Friday, and his glorious resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Today we begin a five-part sermon series entitled “God’s Love.” Today’s sermon is about how God’s love is like that of a mother hen.

How many of you raise chickens? Raise your hands. How many folks here this morning have chickens living on your property? [pause.] How many of you love chickens, or go to visit chickens at someone else’s house? [pause.] How many of you love Kentucky Fried Chicken? [pause to encourage chicken farmers & chicken lovers to raise their hands.]

OK, good. So, when I talk about chickens this morning, if I say something incorrect, you can go to these folks who are knowledgeable about chickens and get the real story.

I don’t know much about chickens. But I do know a few chicken stories. God’s love is like a mother hen: who gathers and protects us.

**I. God’s love is like a mother hen: who gathers and protects us.**

Brett Blair tells this story about a mother hen:

“How have you ever seen a chicken hawk go after its prey? The old mother hen is often aware of the presence of the hawk in time to gather her chicks under her wing. With a furious fuss she squawks till her brood is safe by her side. She fluffs out her wings and protects them with her
own body. The chicken hawk dives and the old hen turns her body toward him and cocks a wary eye without moving from her children. The predator comes in again for the kill and the mother spreads her wings even wider. A third time he dives only to be thwarted by the determined self-sacrifice of the mother hen. She is too big to be a target and the chicks are too safe to be seized so he flies away.”

Jesus despises that Roman collaborator, Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great. The Herodians are hated by many Jews of the time. Jesus refuses to preach and teach in the two cities most associated with Antipas: Sepphoris, which was Herod’s first capital, and Tiberias, which Herod Antipas built to replace Sepphoris.

As the mother hen protects her brood from the chicken hawk, so Jesus longs to protect Jerusalem and the Jewish people from Herod the fox. Jesus uses the term “fox” almost as an expletive when referring to Herod. In the Jewish context of Jesus’ day, the fox is associated with treachery and destruction.

While Herod and his supporters want to lead the people into a new world in which Rome is the center, Jesus comes to call the people to repentance and faith. Luke’s gospel, in particular, sets up Herod as a prime enemy of Jesus and one who plots Jesus’ execution on the cross.

Jesus is victorious over all our enemies. Like a mother hen, Jesus gathers us together as the Church and protects us from the plots of the Evil One.

This is the image Jesus raises up as he laments over Jerusalem; “…as a hen gathers her brood under her wings,” so Jesus longs to gather and protect us from the onslaughts of a world that tries to draw us away from our faith….that tries to draw us away from God…that tries to draw us away from the community of the Church.

Bernard W. Nord offers an engaging paraphrase of Jesus’ words. He writes, “…our
Savior, in a mysteriously strange moment, a moment in which he is warned his life is in jeopardy, says to the messengers of threat, ‘Go and tell the one who threatens -- threatens like a fox threatens the chicken coop, or a coyote the rabbit hutch and the quail covey -- go and tell the fox that I will not flee like a frightened rabbit! Rather, tell the threatening fox that the one he thinks is a vulnerable, pregnant quail is casting out demons. Tell him the one he thinks is a tasty little bunny is casting out demons! Tell the fox that, rather than hovering and quivering beneath the shelter of the palms, the one whom he threatens is curing the world today…and tomorrow…and the next day. And tell the fox that one day, the third day, spoken metaphorically, the work will be finished, all will be cured, the fox will have been chased away forever. Go! Tell the fox!”

Jesus gathers his people together and protects them from the ravages of sin and death. God’s love is like a mother hen: who gathers and protects us.

Martin Luther, in his Large Catechism, summarizes God’s gathering, protecting love in this way:

“There is on earth a little holy flock or community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith. I was brought to it by the Holy Spirit and incorporated into it through the fact that I have heard and still hear God’s Word. In this Christian church we have the forgiveness of sins, which is granted through the holy sacraments and…the Gospel.”

The Church is the greatest contemporary expression of God’s gathering, protecting love. Through the Church, God gathers the faithful together and protects them from the undermining discouragements of the secular world. God’s love is like a mother hen who gathers & protects us.

God’s love is also like a mother hen: who hides us under her wings.
II. God’s love is like a mother hen: who hides us under her wings.

Listen to these great hymns that were sung during the time of Jesus in the synagogues and Temple worship in Jerusalem:

“Hide me in the shadow of thy wings,” 17:8.

“In the shadow of thy wings I will take refuge till the storms of destruction pass by,” 57:1.

“Oh to be safe under the shelter of thy wings,” 61:4.

“In the shadow of thy wings I sing for joy,” 63:7.

“Under his wings you will find refuge,” 91:4.

These songs are found in the Psalms, the hymnbook of the people of Israel. Psalms 17, 36, 57, 61, 63, and 91 all refer to the protective wings of God. So when Jesus uses the image of a mother hen gathering her brood under her wings, the people are familiar with it.

In Luke 13:34 it says that Jerusalem was “not willing” to receive Jesus’ offer of love, protection and comfort.

How often do we refuse Jesus’ love, as well? How often do we reject the shelter of God’s wings, soldiering on under our own power and wisdom; ignoring the help that God in Christ Jesus can provide...the help that God freely offers throughout history, from the beginning of time, and throughout eternity beyond the end of time...the help that God offers most fully in the life, death and resurrection of his son, Jesus Christ?

The sheltering wings of God, of Yahweh, are often lifted up in the songs of Israel, in the Psalms.

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus offers his comfort, like a mother hen – sheltering wings for a frightened people.
Jesus is God. Luke is clear about this. Jesus is clear about this.

Jesus laments Jerusalem’s unwillingness to accept His shelter, His comfort, His servant-king, self-sacrifice for their sakes.

God’s love is like a mother hen who hides us under her wings.

God’s love is also like a mother hen: who dies for us.

III. God’s love is like a mother hen: who dies for us.

Glen E. Ludwig tells this story. It’s not about a mother hen, but rather a mother duck. He writes:

“This past summer, there was a young mother mallard who had her brood. And it was interesting to watch how she took care of all seven of them. When anyone approached the lake, she became immediately aware and would gather her little brood together and hustle them along to hide in the reeds and brush that surrounded the edge of the lake. Once, someone went really close to get a better look, and she flew away. I was surprised by that at first -- a mother abandoning her young. But then it became obvious what she was up to: She was offering herself as a decoy. She wanted the intruders to notice and follow her, away from her ducklings. She was willing to sacrifice herself in order to protect her offspring.

“Now maybe we can understand the lament and the passion in Jesus' own voice. It is the cry of a mother who is worried to death about not only Jerusalem, but about all of us. Like a mother, Jesus sees far more clearly than do we, the children, the danger we are in. Like a mother, Jesus knows we tend to over-estimate our powers and are prone to go off on our own, leaving the protective wings, to seek our own excitement and adventure. And like a mother, Jesus chases after us.

“Do you see the image? Like a mother, Jesus' love is so great that his all-consuming
passion is to sweep us up into his protective arms. And although there are others in pursuit of
him, namely Herod, Jesus, like a mother is persistent. He sticks to what his love compels him to
do. He pursues his flock with a passion. His answer to Herod shows that: He has a little work to
do in Galilee yet, a few chicks to sweep beneath his wings; and then, he is headed to Jerusalem,
where he will, in essence, fly off from his chicks alone and draw God's judgment to him so that
the jaws of death might sink their teeth into his flesh only, and not into his children whom he
loves with a mother-hen's protective passion.”

God’s love, as shown most fully in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, is like a mother
hen: who dies for our sakes.

**Closing.**

It has been said that Jesus’ outstretched arms on the cross begin to resemble the loving
wings of a mother hen, if we look long enough. It doesn’t make sense, this sacrificial protecting
of her young. This is a love that is wrenchingly painful to observe. It is all the more painful
because that love is rejected and despised by so many of the very children to whom it is offered.

One of our most difficult spiritual challenges is to truly believe and accept and feel and
claim and live out of the great love God has for us. It is a love that gathers us into the Church
and offers us spiritual protection through our participation in our church family. It is a love that
shelters us under the wings of a powerful God who is the Creator of the universe. We are
protected and empowered by His Holy Spirit.

It is a love that lives among us in the flesh, that teaches us and that models the servant-
kings' life for us. It is a love that dies for us all, and is raised again, victorious over sin and death.

Today’s gospel reading reminds us that God loves us like a mother hen. Jesus, knowing
that Herod lurks in the shadows, has no concern for himself; his concern is for you and for me,
for all of us. His concern is for his children and for his purpose. He goes to Jerusalem, prepared
to die for us.

This is the message of Lent: Jesus is God, and Jesus loves you and me more than we can
ever fully comprehend.

May you reflect on God’s love for you, and may you receive it in your heart, during this
holy season of Lent.

Amen.