

A Wing and a Prayer

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Community Presbyterian Church - Rochester, Minnesota

2nd Sunday of Lent - March 13, 2022

Texts: Psalm 27, Philippians 3:

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH - A modern paraphrase of Psalm 27

The Lord is my light.

The Lord surrounds me like a warm, familiar quilt, in layers of grace.

Whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the sturdy foundation and the roof over my head. I am not afraid.

When the world is at its worst—when grief clings to my bones,
when fear eats at my confidence, when loneliness moves into my house—

God sets the table, turns on the lights, and invites me to dance.

So even though there are days that feel like too much to bear,

I know—I am not alone.

So I ask the Lord, I seek and I pray—let me live in your house all of my days. Amen

Luke 13:31-35

Jesus went through one town and village after another, teaching of the coming of the realm of God as he made his way to Jerusalem (13:22). Along the way, he aroused the wrath of religious leaders by healing on the sabbath, and by the news God's favor was extended to outsiders in ways that might give insiders a nasty surprise. At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! 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. And I tell you, you

will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"



When we lived in the country north of here, two nuns lived just down the road. Sister Francette and Sister Margaret had acquired an old farmstead and, with tireless energy, made it clean and warm and welcoming: house and barn and garden and chicken coop and all. They called it Li'l Farm. And there,

over the course of twenty-five years, they sheltered and nurtured and mothered the most unloved, neglected and abused children of the community.¹

Li'l Farm was the local foster home of choice. Literally hundreds of children passed through the Sisters' caring hands. They took in newborn crack babies, and troubled teens, and every kind of child in between; they once kept a family of seven siblings together. The farm, too, was populated: with potbellied pigs, miniature goats, woolly sheep, *one* donkey (named Uno), dogs and cats, and birds: ducks in a pond, turkeys and charming spotted guinea fowl, a raucous tribe of strutting peacocks. And, naturally, chickens of every sort, ranging freely. And all of them (except the donkey) happily reproducing, just as nature intended.



The children, if they could walk and carry a small pail, learned how to feed and water each animal; they cradled the newborn lambs, and tickled the piglets. They learned how to care for creatures even more vulnerable than themselves. They learned from Francette and Margaret how to love the animals and how to love each other. And they learned *from* the animals. One little girl who had come from a desperate situation at the age of four was terrified of everything, really. Little by little, she started creeping closer to watch a family of chickens, pecking away in the leaves and brush. A thunderstorm blew up suddenly, and instantly the mother hen dashed here and there, clucking and gathering the babies under her wings. Covering them. Protecting them. The child watched and her eyes grew wide. She turned to Francette and said, "So that's what mommies do!"



The children of Li'l Farm were there because they weren't safe in their own homes. Their parents were incapable of caring for them. But most of those parents were not evil; they were not the enemy. They were lost souls themselves. Francette and Margaret worked with them, too; their goal was always to bring families back together, if possible. They succeeded surprisingly often. But until home was safe, they shielded those children from harm. Just



¹ Handprints of a few of Li'l Farm's children.

https://www.hometownsource.com/county_news_review/free/li-l-farm-children-s-home-closes-its-doors-after-25-years-of-service

as they closed the chickens securely in their pen at night, protecting them from the foxes who



roamed the woods. The foxes were not evil, either; though they were a real threat to the chickens; but the Sisters made darn sure their pets were not prey. Li'l Farm kept nurturing children and chickens, and potbellied pigs - and parents. In the process, they taught our town how to love. They had no enemies, and a multitude of friends.

The Pharisees came to Jesus with a warning - or was it a threat? "Go away," they said. "Herod wants to kill you."

Herod was a threat, yes. But he wasn't the ultimate enemy. "Go tell that fox," Jesus answered, "that, whether he likes it or not, I'm going to keep on fighting the true enemies: sickness, hunger, broken relationships. If that scares him enough to arrest me, so be it. I'm going to keep seeking and saving the lost and tormented souls. If this makes me unpopular, so be it. I'm going to Jerusalem to speak truth to power, as prophets have always done, and if I'm killed for it, as they were, so be it. I will keep on."

And then Jesus laments. Not for himself. Not for his own death. But for Jerusalem. For the people he loved and longed for, the people he came to save, the people who would end his life: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"



Does Jesus lament over us today? We, who see enemies on every side, and go after them with deadly force, and somehow never confront the true enemies: poverty, hunger, inequity, fueled as they are by ignorance, arrogance and greed? Does Jesus lament over us, so quick to identify the trouble outside ourselves, so blind to the trouble within? I mean, the unshed tears, the unspoken fears, the untended grief, the unheard anger, the unmet needs, the untreated wounds that propel us into a spiral of violence and death? We need to look within ourselves to see where the seeds of discontent and distrust germinate. God longs to gather us and heal us of the sickness and soothe the sadness in our souls. When we are unburdened of our inner sorrows, when we can love ourselves, flawed as we know ourselves to be, we can love others as God intended. Only healed souls can heal souls.



We can be taught to love, we can be educated toward peace. This is not a mystery. God became one of us to show us how it's done. Yes, we have to find a way to keep the foxes out of

the henhouse, to protect the innocent and the vulnerable. And it may be that just as there are many paths to God, there are many paths to justice, there are many paths to mercy, there are many paths to understanding and truth and peace. I won't presume to define yours. I think Jesus only asks that you follow your own path with humility and with heart. If lives are lost in the process, then I pray, let them not be lost in the heat of vengeance or cold ruthlessness, but with genuine grief for their loss.

The Quakers take a beautiful saying from their founder, whose name was, ironically, Fox. George Fox. He said, "I dwell in that spirit that takes away the occasion for war." That's 17th century-speak. What it means, I think, is that I pray for God to help me live in a way that doesn't feed the war machine. This might determine how I eat, what I drive (or if I drive!), the work I do, where I invest my time, how I use my money. How can we live, if we are not sheltered beneath the wings of our loving God? How can you know peace without trusting that your life - your one true, eternal life - is hidden with Christ in God? Only healed souls can heal souls.

But that is Jesus' desire for you today: to heal your soul.
That is Jesus' gift. This is the one who said, "I came so that all God's children may have life...and have it in abundance."
Amen. Thanks be to God.

Prayers

God of love, in the face of violence, your grace persists. In the winds of fear, your love endures. In places of brokenness, your healing continues. Help us, with you, to keep on confronting the enemies that besiege us all: poverty, inequity, disease, despair. May we do what you call us to do, knowing we remain safe under the shadow of your wing.

While events in Europe dominate the news, still we know people suffer here at home: we pray for families and individuals struggling with covid; and for children again missing school as teachers plead for increased support. We pray for the day when education and health care will have all the funding they need; and the need for military spending will shrivel to nothing.

We pray for those who carry hidden burdens; give us the courage for honesty with ourselves, one another, and you. And for those whose needs are close to our hearts. Comfort all who mourn with the certain knowledge that their loved ones rest eternally in you. All this we pray in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...

