

**“As a Hen Gathers her Chicks”**

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

February 28, 2021 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

**Hymns for Worship Video – February 28, 2021**

“There is a balm in Gilead” #747 in the Book of Praise vs. 1, 2, 3.

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*Chorus*

There is a balm in Gilead  
To make the wounded whole  
There is a balm in Gilead  
To heal the sin-sick soul

**V. 1** Sometimes I feel discouraged  
And think my work's in vain  
But then the Holy Spirit  
Revives my soul again

*Chorus*

**V. 2** Don't ever feel discouraged  
For Jesus is your Friend  
And if you lack for knowledge  
He'll ne'er refuse to lend

*Chorus*

**V. 3** If you cannot preach like Peter  
If you cannot pray like Paul  
You can tell the Love of Jesus  
And say He died for all

*Chorus*

“Softly and tenderly” #640 in the Book of Praise vs 1, 2, 3

*William Lamartine Thompson*

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**V. 1** Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling  
Calling for you and for me  
See on the portals He's waiting and watching  
Watching for you and for me

*Chorus*

Come home come home  
Ye who are weary come home  
Earnestly tenderly Jesus is calling  
Calling O sinner come home

**V. 2** Why should we tarry when Jesus is pleading  
Pleading for you and for me  
Why should we linger and heed not His mercies  
Mercies for you and for me  
*Chorus*

**V. 3** O for the wonderful love He has promised  
Promised for you and for me  
Tho we have sinned He has mercy and pardon  
Pardon for you and for me  
*Chorus*

Closing Chorus: "Go now in peace"

*Don Besig & Nancy Price, Harold Flammer Music 1988,1989*

Go now in peace  
Never be afraid  
God will go with you each hour of every day  
Go now in faith steadfast strong and true  
Know he will guide you in all you do  
Go now in love  
And show you believe  
Reach out to others so all the world can see  
God will be there watching from above  
Go now in peace in faith & in love.  
Amen Amen Amen

**Scripture Texts: Scriptures: Psalm 122**

I was glad when they said to me,  
 “Let us go to the house of the Lord!”  
<sup>2</sup>Our feet are standing  
 within your gates, O Jerusalem.  
<sup>3</sup>Jerusalem—built as a city  
 that is bound firmly together.  
<sup>4</sup>To it the tribes go up,  
 the tribes of the Lord,  
 as was decreed for Israel,  
 to give thanks to the name of the Lord.  
<sup>5</sup>For there the thrones for judgment were set up,  
 the thrones of the house of David.  
<sup>6</sup>Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:  
 “May they prosper who love you.  
<sup>7</sup>Peace be within your walls,  
 and security within your towers.”  
<sup>8</sup>For the sake of my relatives and friends  
 I will say, “Peace be within you.”  
<sup>9</sup>For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,  
 I will seek your good.

**Luke 13:1-9, 31-35**

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup>He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? <sup>3</sup>No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. <sup>4</sup>Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup>No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

*The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree*

<sup>6</sup>Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. <sup>7</sup>So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ <sup>8</sup>He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. <sup>9</sup>If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

*(Continuing at Vs. 31)*

<sup>31</sup>At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” <sup>32</sup>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. <sup>33</sup>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.’ <sup>34</sup>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! <sup>35</sup>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.’”

**Meditation**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

One of my favourite experiences happens every year. Without fail, I can count on a moment where I am surprised by something gentle and beautiful, strong even though it may seem fragile. In the early spring I can expect to see a small flower beginning to show through the melting snow and ice. It's usually pretty mucky at that time, but inevitably I will see a tiny bit of bright colour in the midst of the muddiness. It's usually in the front garden at the house. I will look down, and a wee bit of green or purple will be poking through the muddy snow. Every time it happens is like the first time, and I always stop to enjoy the amazing sight. It is a sign of growth, new life, warmer weather around the corner. It always lifts me up and reminds me there is beauty in this world that can sometimes seem pretty muddy and dreary. Even though it happens every year, it comes as a gentle surprise when things feel kind of heavy. I really appreciate it as an act of nature that cannot be stopped because it is the natural rhythm of creation. It has a way of poking a bit of colour into the grey-ness of the last part of winter.

As I read the Gospel passage from Luke today, I have the same kind of experience. This text is filled with references to sacrifice, death and destruction. Repent or perish, Jesus says. He tells the parable of the fig tree, not the most uplifting of stories. Pharisees go to Jesus to warn him about Herod's desire to kill him, and Jesus digs in his heals which will make Herod even more angry. Jesus refers to Jerusalem as the city that kills prophets. Again, hardly uplifting. But then he says something curious, using an image that always strikes me as a touch of gentleness in a harsh situation. He says he desires to gather his children as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. A hen does this to protect her young ones, to keep them safe from danger and threat. She draws them to herself so that she will be their full protection. But as soon as Jesus portrays his desire to protect his own by drawing them to himself, he is right back into the harsh reality. He longs to protect them, but they refuse to go to him. They refuse to see him as the One who can save them from destruction. And so he warns them they will not see him again until he arrives in the city where he will die.

I clearly remember when I was in Grade five, my teacher took our class to a farm where we learned about the process of a chick being hatched. It was fascinating. There were eggs in various stages of the development process – some were at the beginning of the process, others were in the process of hatching, and others had newly born chicks laying half-in-half-out of the shells that had held them. The new chicks were weak, tired from the act of hatching, and needed to be warmed by lamps at just the right temperature as they gathered enough strength to get on their feet. Having seen the hatching process, the farmer then showed us chicks with hens. The chicks were so fluffy and little, and the hens just kind of stood there, pecking at the ground for whatever grain they could find. But as soon as we got close to the enclosure, one hen lifted her head and made her way into the sea of yellow fluff, drawing wee chicks close to her and staring at us all the while. We thought it was funny that she seemed to think we were a threat. The farmer explained that in her eyes we were a threat, and she was protecting her vulnerable little ones. There was no way we were to get in her way when she was protecting her chicks – that beak was pretty sharp!

As I think back on that experience, I realize the fierce yet gentle way that hen did what she had to do to protect those vulnerable chicks. One would not think a chicken would be the

greatest example of how Jesus longs to draw us, in our vulnerability, to himself. Hens themselves are vulnerable – just ask the farmer in BC that caught a lynx in his chicken coop last week. However, the image works. Hens are also fiercely protective of their chicks. Jesus wants to cover us with his wings, so to speak. He is gentle with us, but fiercely protects us from the evil one. And it breaks his heart when people refuse his protection – his salvation – and leave themselves open to destruction. That is why he made himself vulnerable on the cross – to save us from the one who wants to destroy us.

As difficult as this passage may sound, it is really a lament – Jesus’ lament – for Jerusalem. Jerusalem is broken. Jesus’ heart is broken for that great city, for it is run by those who are not friends to the Jews, or to justice. Pilate and Herod have combined forces in their common mission against the Jewish leaders. Professor Mitzi J. Smith of Columbia Theological Seminary in Georgia writes, “In his lament over Jerusalem, Jesus tells the truth about Jerusalem’s history of killing prophets and stoning Yahweh’s messengers (19:34), as well as the violence Pilate committed against them (13:1). Jesus laments on his journey toward Jerusalem (9:51)... Jesus mentions death or murder throughout [this text]: the murder of some Galileans, the death of eighteen people as a result of the fall of the tower of Siloam, and the death of a barren fig tree. It is no accident that this litany of death and lament is evoked as Jesus journeys toward his own death in Jerusalem. Jesus’ call for Jerusalem to repent is about past sins, including sins against the prophets, and as a pre-emptive plea concerning his own death. Jesus is also a Galilean, belongs to the prophetic tradition, and will join the nation’s ancestral memorial of prophets that Jerusalem killed (13:34). Despite Herod’s plot to kill Jesus; Jesus will enter Jerusalem, but not before his ministry is complete (13:31-33). He must die in Jerusalem like other prophets before him, including Stephen (Acts 7:37-60).”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus’ words form a lament because they are the truth about Jerusalem’s history, and about what he will endure when he enters the city. He tells the parable of the fig tree to illustrate what he is thinking and feeling. “He is calling Jerusalem to repent, but a people or a nation must admit and be conscious of its wrongdoing in order to change its commitments, policies, and practices.”<sup>2</sup> How many are the nations in our current point in history whose names could be in place of Jerusalem. The cries against injustice and for justice are getting louder and louder, because nations and governments cannot see, or do not want to see, the changes that are needed to create just and equal societies. And so Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem could be our lament over any number of situations in the world today.

However, lament has purpose. Biblical lament is lament with hope, hope that God will intervene, hope that hurts will be healed and divisions overcome. Faithful lament is offered with hope that God is listening and will respond to protect us. Jesus’ lament may sound heart-rending and full of despair, but God is listening to those words from within his own heart, and hears their purpose. The plan is set, but sometimes we cannot appreciate a resolution without first lamenting the problem.

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<sup>1</sup> Workingpreacher.org Commentary on Luke 13:1-9, 31-35 February 28, 2021. Mitzi J. Smith, J. Davison Philips Professor of New Testament, Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Ga.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

As we are making the journey through the season of Lent, it is appropriate for us to be reminded of the magnitude of Jesus' purpose, and how he felt about the brokenness of God's people, of Jerusalem, of Jewish leaders, of the world. His lament comes as he looks toward his final steps to the cross. It comes as he anticipates the betrayal and hurt he will experience. It is no wonder his lament is filled with so much darkness and death. He is painfully aware of why he has to do what he came to do.

Jesus' words in today's text also point to the unfulfilled hopes of the Psalmist who prayed for peace within Jerusalem, and praised God for the holy city's strength, prosperity and security. Where Jesus cries out in sorrow for the city of God's people, the Psalmist once proclaimed great joy at being called to Jerusalem and the Temple.

*I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!"  
Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.*

It was a blessing and cause for rejoicing when people went to the city to pray, to worship, to celebrate festivals. It was good to stand within the city and soak in its history, its purpose and its godliness. But things changed, as they tend to do.

By the time Jesus utters his words of sorrow over the city, things have really changed, and not for the better. Here is where the Psalmist's words become even more powerful as they remind us that there was hope before Jesus' earthly life and ministry, there is still hope as Jesus makes his way toward the cross, and there will always be hope through faith in him.

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:*

*"May they prosper who love you.*

*Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers."*

*For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, "Peace be within you."*

*For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,*

*I will seek your good.*

"God anointed Jerusalem and its leaders to be good and just towards its citizens and neighbors, to embody and be bearers of good news"<sup>3</sup>

We, generations after this time in the history of God's people, the people who proclaim Jesus the risen Christ, who believe in his sacrificial death and saving resurrection, can give thanks that our lament over the world, its brokenness, its pain, is not without hope. Our sorrow over what we see, and about which we can often feel helpless and despairing, even afraid, is met with the risen Lord's Spirit of comfort. Like a hen gathering her chicks, the Spirit of God gently gathers us in and fiercely protects us. That which threatens us has been defeated, yes, but it still hovers, wanting to grab us from safety, trying to lead us away from the security we know under the loving wings of the Spirit. Jesus longs for us to be gathered to himself, within his loving and gentle, yet fierce protection of his own. Just as the farmer my Grade five class visited told us not

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

to get in the way of a hen keeping her chicks safe, don't try to get in the way of the Spirit of Christ protecting God's people. Nothing can defeat its desire to keep us within the safety of God's strong arms.

Under His Wings

**V. 1** Under His wings I'm safely abiding  
Tho the night deepens and tempests are wild  
Still I can trust Him I know He will keep me  
He has redeemed me and I am His child

*Chorus*

Under His wings under His wings  
Who from His love can sever  
Under His wings my soul shall abide  
Safely abide forever

**V. 2** Under His wings what a refuge in sorrow  
How the heart yearningly turns to His rest  
Often when earth has no balm for my healing  
There I find comfort and there I find rest  
Under His wings under His wings  
Who from His love can sever  
Under His wings my soul shall abide  
Safely abide forever

**V. 3** Under His wings what a precious enjoyment  
There will I hide till life's trials are o'er  
Sheltered protected no evil can harm me  
Resting in Jesus I'm safe evermore  
Under His wings under His wings  
Who from His love can sever  
Under His wings my soul shall abide  
Safely abide forever<sup>4</sup>

The beloved old hymn published in 1894 still expresses the assurance we have in Jesus. When we join his lament, we do so in the hope of his restoration and healing. Our laments are heard by our gracious God and the response is divine comfort. We are safe to lament, and we are reassured of God's Spirit of rest and peace. For we know this in the fulfilment of Jesus' purpose: to die in Jerusalem, and rise again in glory. Amen.

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