

“God Loves You”

Luke 13:31-35 & Psalm 27

Pastor James York

March 13, 2022

Prayer for Understanding Holy God, this life of ours is full to the brim. Our days are overflowing with emails and to-do lists, schedules and notifications, assignments and deadlines. We wake up feeling behind, we go to sleep worrying about tomorrow, and we know—there has to be more than this. So, we pray: bend down and show us the way.

Leave breadcrumbs in the street. Point us toward awe and wonder. Guide us to intimacy and trust. Gift us with laughter that will make us cry and hope that will make us feel alive. We want a new kind of full to the brim. Show us the way. We are listening for your cues. Gratefully we pray, amen.

I grew up on a dairy farm on the edge of the school district resulting in long bus rides with students of all ages. My mom packed me a lunch every day. I kept asking for a bigger lunch. My mom became suspicious. She asked me numerous questions until I explained that some older kids were stealing my lunch. Suddenly, I saw my mom’s protective love. My dad had to calm her down from going to school and going to the house of each person who stole my lunch. I am not sure of all the things my mom did to stop the theft, but no one ever stole my lunch again. In addition, I now had a protector. My mom met with our neighbor’s mom. Her son Brian, who was a few years older, watched out for me. We became friends. Years later he invited me to be a wrestler and a football player. Both of which were critical to my growth and academic success. I hope you have a mother that loves you with protective love. I hope you have people in your life that love you with protective love. You have a God who loves you with protective love. Jesus explains that God’s love for you, for everyone, is like a hen gathering her chicks together and protecting each chick under her wing.

All love comes from God. We love because God first loved us. Some people, especially many mothers, have the ability to love even when their child engages in destructive behavior, even when their child rebels, even when their child repeatedly rejects their mother’s love. A love that never gives up. A love that always works for the best. A love that is steadfast no matter what the child does or does not do. God loves you completely no matter what. All the love you have experienced comes from God.

The image of God as a mother hen reveals God’s nurture, care, and shelter. God has your back. God putting out a wing to shield you reveals that God is aware of every threat to your well-being, every incident that may diminish your living life full to the brim.

Rather than asking, “What’s wrong with you?” God asks, “What happened to you?” God listens. God longs to heal you, perfect you, mend your brokenness and fill your emptiness. God laments. God weeps with you for every tear, hurt, and emptiness. God longs to fill you with abundant life, fully alive living, a life full beyond the brim spilling love over into the entire cosmos. Jesus came to gather all God’s children together, to make each person whole and to show us the way to eternal life in heaven where we will be protected by God for eternity.

Some people believe that the greatest form of love is setting someone free. God sets you free. God honors your free will. God never forces you. Even if one, rejects God, does not believe in God, engages in all sorts of destructive behavior, God still loves them completely. God is always working behind the scenes in every person’s life, expressing love, sharing love, inspiring love, and inviting them home to God’s super mother protective love. God longs to gather us all together, one family, safe, secure under God’s wing.

Luke 13:31-35 NLT “At that time some Pharisees said to Jesus, “Get away from here if you want to live! Herod wants to kill you!” Jesus replied, “Go tell that fox that I will keep on casting out demons and healing people today and tomorrow; and the third day I will accomplish my purpose. Yes, today, tomorrow, and the next day I must proceed on my way. For it would not do for a prophet of God to be killed except in Jerusalem! “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God’s messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you would not let me. And now, look, your house is abandoned. And you will never see me again until you say, ‘Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!’”

God is our refuge. There is nothing that can separate you from God, or could keep God from gathering you in, protecting you fiercely. Jesus’ lament for Jerusalem is seemingly counter to how he is treated by Jerusalem. And yet,

we receive grace upon grace even if not deserved. Jesus as a mother hen is an image of fierce love and protection. You are a precious child of God. God longs for you. God will gather you in. No matter how much we try to separate ourselves from God, God will run to protect us. God's love for us is fuller than we can imagine.

Reflect on the image of you as a vulnerable chick and God as your protective hen. Reflect on moments when you felt loved and protected. Thank God for these moments for God was the source of that love. Imagine how God's love expands throughout the cosmos. Reflect on a person who continues to love someone who willingly choose a destructive path, who willingly choose to hurt others, to hurt themselves, to hurt the one who is loving them. That is grace, free unconditional love. Allow these reflections to expand your notions of God's love for you. Allow these reflections to expand your receiving of love and sharing of love.

Maya Angelou repeatedly reflected on the truth. God loves me. God loves me. God loves me. Maya got emotional thinking about the vastness of God's love and said: "It still humbles me, that this force—which made leaves and fleas and stars and rivers and you—loves me. God's love is amazing. I can do anything and do it well. Any good thing I can do it. That is why I am who I am. Yes, because God loves me. I am amazed at God's love for me. And grateful for God's love."

Biblical scholar, Seminary Professor and Episcopal Priest Wil Gafney prayed: "God of our mothers, fold us under the shelter of your wings with all your children of every race and every faith." Wil preached: "Jesus was doing the kind of preaching that few people do today, the kind of preaching that will get you killed. Jesus understood the threat and said, 'Bring it!'" Jesus knew that death was the likely, if not inevitable outcome of his ministry and he was ready. Jesus would not back down; he would not run scared. Jesus spoke of the death of prophets like himself. Women and men who stood up to power. Jesus was not willing to die because he was the son of God. He was willing to die because he was the kind of man who stood with the poor and oppressed peoples of earth against the corrupting power of empire. Preaching in Jerusalem could be dangerous because Jerusalem was a wealthy religious city. Wealth is not intrinsically evil, but it can be seductive and corrupting as is the privilege wealth engenders. Jerusalem is where the monarchy and priesthood organized and institutionalized religion. Preaching against empire, those who designed and implemented it and those who benefitted from it is dangerous, as is me preaching against the current manifestations of empire, white supremacy, wealth, and privilege built on the backs of enslaved and exploited black and brown peoples. I do not believe my fellow Episcopalians are likely to kill me, but I know Episcopalians like other Christians have been on the wrong side of slavery and human rights as well as on the right side. Jesus did not turn from Jerusalem, the place where prophets are killed. Jesus went to Jerusalem because he loved Jerusalem. Jesus loved Jerusalem at the cost of his life. We too are Jerusalem. We may not have a reputation for killing priests, pastors, or prophets but we break the heart of God every bit as much. And Jesus loved and loves us too, even at the cost of his life. Love is at the heart of this lesson. Jesus opening his arms wide and sweeping us up and into his embrace. In choosing for himself the image of a mother hen collecting and protecting her chicks, Jesus gives birth to some of the most enduring imagery to shape the church's prayer language. I suspect that St. Julian of Norwich reflected on this passage when she wrote: "Christ is our mother, brother and savior. Our natural mother, our gracious mother, because God willed to become our mother in everything, took the ground for God's work most humbly and most mildly in the maiden's womb. A mother can give her child milk to suck, but our precious mother, Jesus, can feed us with himself." Some of us are unwilling to be mothered. And some have never been mothered at all. In the Gospel Jesus says, "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing!" What does it look like to refuse to be mothered by Jesus? At one level it means to accept a Jesus who troubles our notions of gender and sexuality. An unmarried Jewish man was a scandal and a man without children was pitiable. Jesus refused the tradition of giving thanks for not being a woman. Jesus offers a masculinity and a divinity that is neither patriarchal nor even androcentric. But some want no part of that kind of Jesus; nor any kind of Jesus who does not agree with what they agree with or hate who they hate. For some, the bible's male grammar has become an idol, so much so that folk would rather be unmothered by God than embrace God as our mother. Yet God is so far beyond gender that in scripture God has a womb, birthed the sea, and fathered the rain; no one gender can contain God. God's love transverses and encompasses all things. Our first lesson reminds us that Abraham is the father of many peoples, many different peoples. We do not all have the same stories, memories, or traditions. We do not even share the same prayers or scriptures. But we do share the same God. The one God who is known by many names. We do not all believe the same things about that God, not even in the Church, not even in the Episcopal Church. God is big enough to weather our disagreements. God is who God is whether we understand or accept someone else's understanding of God. God does not need us to argue or fight or prove who God is or is not. Our job is to bear witness, by loving as God loves – which though impossible for us is still a worthy goal. The love of God for us is so deep and wide that there are not enough words or images in any language to tell it. Lent is an opportunity for us to

reflect on and rest in that love, a love that draw us more deeply into the embrace of God's wings. Today's Gospel is an invitation to embrace God in new language and different images as open, free and boundless as is the love of God for us." That was excerpts from a sermon from Wil Gafney.

Psalm 27 is believed to be a prayer by a person who sought safety in the Temple. They were fleeing persecution. They were fighting for their life. **Psalm 27 MSG "Light, space, zest—that is God! So, with God on my side I am fearless, afraid of no one and nothing. When vandal hordes ride down ready to eat me alive, those bullies and toughs fall flat on their faces. When besieged, I am calm as a baby. When all hell breaks loose, I am collected and cool. I am asking God for one thing, only one thing: To live with God in God's house my whole life long. I will contemplate God's beauty; I will study at God's feet. That is the only quiet, secure place in a noisy world, The perfect getaway, far from the buzz of traffic. God holds me head and shoulders above all who try to pull me down. I am headed for God's place to offer anthems that will raise the roof! Already I am singing God-songs; I am making music to God. Listen, God, I'm calling at the top of my lungs: "Be good to me! Answer me!" When my heart whispered, "Seek God," my whole being replied, "I'm seeking God!" Do not hide from me now! You have always been right there for me; do not turn your back on me now. Do not throw me out, do not abandon me; you have always kept the door open. My father and mother walked out and left me, but God took me in. Point me down your highway, God; direct me along a well-lighted street; show my enemies whose side you are on. Do not throw me to the dogs, those liars who are out to get me, filling the air with their threats. I am sure now I will see God's goodness in the exuberant earth. Stay with God! Take heart. Do not quit. I will say it again: Stay with God."**

God's motherly love protects us. God's motherly love shelters us under God's wing. Safe in the arms of Mother God this person now sees God's goodness in the exuberant earth. Jesus came to gather us together, to save us, to make our joy full.

Come Rain or Shine

A poem by Sarah Speed

"I will keep on."

That's what I heard him say.

I will keep on driving out demons and healing people, speaking the truth, and loving endlessly, searching for the lost sheep, and crying for the brokenhearted, feeding the hungry and welcoming the outcast.

"I will keep on."

That's what he said, right after he said my name, right after he called me beloved, right after he welcomed me home and saved me a seat.

And I knew, there was no stopping him. I was under his wing. Come rain or come shine, today and tomorrow, this love keeps on.

God's love is working, creating, mending, sustaining, an abundant life for all of us, a life full to the brim with ever expanding love, peace, and joy. Amen