

## ***“Jesus’ Lament”***

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia  
Season of Lent, Sunday, February 21, 2016  
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Luke 13: 31-35

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

### Sermon

#### **Images of God**

*“Shelter in the Shadow of God’s Wings”*

One spring Jesus lamented over Jerusalem.

He looked over the city and wept.

He was warned to watch out for King Herod, that his life was in danger.

Jesus said, *“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!”*

Jesus connected with the imagery of God’s providence,

of God’s loving care as like that of a hen who watches over her brood.

Who wouldn’t want to be welcomed, fussed over,

loved, and protected under the wings of God?

Such a kind and generous imagery Jesus offered to himself and his people, one of God as a mother hen,

clucking and fussing and keeping watch over her young, her beloved, her children, the whole people of God.

This story is shared in both Matthew and Luke (Matthew 23:37-39; Luke 13:34-35),

and in almost identical words,

yet is not found in Mark, which had been drafted a full generation earlier.

We can deduce that this passage was originally in a narrative source that has been lost to the ages and is known today simply as Q.

When Matthew wrote he had Q and Mark's gospel;  
Luke had Q and Mark's gospel when he wrote;  
however, Matthew and Luke did not have access to each other's  
gospels.

So when we find material in Matthew and Luke that is not in Mark  
yet is very similar or identical,

we deduce it comes from the source known as Q.

And Q, my friends, was bold and brave enough to tell stories of Jesus  
that expand hearts and minds  
with historic and varied images of God.

The Greek word *ornis* translated "bird"  
could suggest either "cock" or "hen",  
yet here it must be a female bird

[because] the possessives ("her") connected to it

in both Gospels are feminine. [1]

The content reminds us of Hebrew Scriptures

from Isaiah

that speak of God in motherly ways.

And why not?

Jesus' Creator is like a mother hen,

and like Zion's motherly God described in the later chapters of Isaiah,

God wants to shelter and protect the chicks,

chicks who are symbolic of Jerusalem's children.

This picture of protecting wings references other Old  
Testament passages.

Psalms 17, 36, 57, 61, 63, and 91 address God with similar  
phrases

like "shelter in the shadow of your wings."

Jesus is even more direct.

Jesus paints a picture of God gathering the young,

and in his imagery the wings belong to a female bird with a "brood".

The maternal reference in this New Testament passage is explicit.

And why not?

God is love!

And God's love comes to us in multifaceted forms and experiences,  
from tough love to nurturing love,  
from sacrificial love to redemptive love,  
from reconciling love to brotherly love,  
from sisterly love to unconditional love.

## **Images of God**

*"Seeing the Traditional in a New Light"*

A few winters ago I was blessed to visit with a classroom of second graders.

A boy decided that saying "Mr. Brewer-Calvert" was too much of a mouthful  
so he proceeded to call me "Mr. Smith".

That morning the boys and girls drew pictures of the joys of winter.

A girl nearby said she had just come from a ski trip  
so she drew a mountain slope with ski lift and trails.  
One child animated a field of snow  
with a single green sprout pushing its way toward the sunlight.  
Many of the young people sketched images of Santa Claus.  
The Santa we have come to know and cherish --  
the sleigh riding, gift-giving, rotund, happy man  
in a red suit trimmed with white fur,  
with the long white beard and rosy cheeks --  
that is exactly the image the children drew.  
Would you expect anything else?  
I mean, that is what Santa looks like...right?  
Except not to the child across the desk from me.  
She slowly, fastidiously created out of bright

Crayola crayons

a Santa whose body type and posture and facial features were distinctly Asian.  
Santa looked remarkably like her own father,  
her beloved giver of gifts and bearer of paternal love in her home.  
Suddenly I saw the traditional in a new light.  
And why not?  
Who is to say that everyone's image of Santa  
has to correspond to the Coca Cola ad campaign,  
or to the Norman Rockwell version,  
or to the vision of Thomas Nast in 1822?  
Is there really, truly a correct and absolute image of St. Nicholas?

## **Images of God**

*"Entry Point to the Holy"*

One summer I was in a different kind of classroom,  
this time filled with pastors and priests and ministers  
from as wide a range of religions and regions as you can shake a stick  
at.

We were there to learn the fundamentals of pastoral counseling  
so we could serve as Associate Chaplains for the county hospital.

The Chaplain teaching the course asked us,

*"When you step into a hospital room to visit with a patient,  
whose God do you represent?"*

Well, you know every ego there thought in private or said aloud, *"Mine."*

To which the Chaplain said, *"No."*

*When you enter the room of a patient,  
you represent their understanding of God.*

*You represent their understanding, their perception,  
their belief, their grasp of who God is in their life.*

*So please leave your personal understanding of God at the door.*

*Be totally present for the one in need,  
for the one whose hurting, for the one healing."*

And why not?

Who is to say a clergy person has a lock on what God is like?

This is good council for hospital rooms

as well as church classrooms, meeting rooms, sanctuary rooms,

and whenever you visit family living rooms.  
Set your ego aside;  
lay aside your need to be right and self-righteousness;  
take up the gifts of generosity and graciousness,  
allowing other people's imagery of God  
to be their entry point to the Holy.

### **Images of God**

*"Every Side Reflects Light"*

Rabbi Harold Kushner said that the purpose of worship  
is to help people to connect with God and one another.  
In the context of worship  
we draw upon a variety of sensual and sensate experiences.  
We explore the presence of the holiness in our midst with aromas and tastes,  
with words, readings, litanies, and sacred texts;  
we draw upon music,  
whether by singing or listening or playing  
or clapping our hands and tapping our feet;  
we welcome the visual in the purity and simplicity of this space  
and in the beauty in each and every face.  
For every single person here today  
there is a unique understanding of God,  
a different experience of what the Holy One looks like  
and sounds like and connects with our living souls.  
We each have an image of God,  
and no two are going to be exactly alike.  
Someone once shared that the Bible is like a diamond.  
Like a diamond every side reflects the light outward in unique and lovely ways,  
and no two people see a diamond exactly the same way.  
Neither do we all see or hear the Word in uniformity.

And why not?

The Good News is that the diversity and universality of our paths to God's love  
is not a matter of being right or wrong, inspired or indifferent;  
what matters is the relationship each living soul has with the Living  
Hope.

### **Images of God**

*"A Little Revolution"*

One autumn I attended worship in James Chapel at Union Theological Seminary.  
Previously for the first twenty-two years of my life  
God was male and named Father.  
And He might have looked a little like Father Time,  
except that He had a halo and sat on a throne behind an golden gate.  
On that first experience of worship of the Living Christ in chapel,  
a prayer was offered to "Mother/Father God".  
Later the Lord was called She.  
The Holy Spirit was likened to a nurturing maternal being

whose practice and will is for mercy and comfort, grace and empowerment.  
Tell you what, from that experience forward my known universe exploded.  
I initially responded with judgment and a harsh critique.  
My faith felt like it was being challenged, changed, threatened,  
enhanced, engaged, and stimulated.  
Over the course of many months and miles  
I went through the seven emotional Stages of Grief:  
    shock, denial, bargaining, guilt, anger, depression,  
        and, finally, acceptance,  
            one stage after another,  
                not necessarily in that order,  
                    and some stages more than  
                        once.  
                            A little revolution for your  
                                soul is not altogether a bad thing;  
with love and guidance it can be a healthy means of spiritual formation.  
Over time I came to a place of acceptance:  
there are images and understandings of God other than my own.  
Today I cherish the hope that I may be shaped and guided  
in the process of growing, growing wiser, growing up, growing deeper in the  
faith.

And why not?  
I've met people whose male figures in their lives were abusive, violent, mean;  
a maternal, female imagery of God became a refreshing entry point.  
I've prayed with souls whose spirits were beaten down by so-called Christians  
who insisted that their language, their verbiage, their creed  
    was the only way to speak the secret password that opens the Pearly  
Gates.  
    With the advent of inclusive language,  
for many folks the veil is lifted,  
    tears and fears fall away,  
        and a new light shines and faces are transfigured in our  
    midst.

    And for those for whom it does nothing,  
remember that it's not about you,  
    nor does inclusive or exclusive language define you  
    or deny your relationship with the holy.

    Christianity is not about a place of final arrival  
as much as it is about growing, learning, sharing, experiencing.

By the grace of God and thanks to the members and friends in Christ's Church,  
I have come to a spiritual point in my faith journey  
    where I may set awhile at the Lord's Table and give thanks to Jesus  
Christ,  
    all the while in the shelter of God's wings, alongside  
    neighbors,  
some of whom prefer language for God that is male-centric  
    and some who use inclusive language

and some folks for whom there are no words, no words,  
only a shy smile, a hand on the shoulder, a tear of  
gratitude.

### **God's Image of Us**

*"Shelter in the Shadow of Your Wings"*

Let us not project onto God our own images.

We are made in the image of God; God is not made in our image.

And why not?

It is one thing to seek imagery to help us to articulate the unexplainable,  
to help us to understand that which we cannot grasp,  
to help us to feel what is as subtle as a breeze,  
as close as a breath,  
as distant as clouds on a windy day.

It is another thing altogether to create an idol,  
to build an image that we get locked into and onto  
and then choose to worship, to hold up our own creation as sacred.

Maybe, just maybe, the Christian ideal this season  
would be to flip the conversation that Jesus started  
when he looked over the city and lamented for his beloved:

What image are you and I projecting to God?

What imagery would you like for your neighbors to have of you?

Do our words and works communicate that the Church is like a  
mother hen?

Who finds shelter under our wings,  
welcome in our words,  
blessings  
in our bridge-building ,

and Living Bread in our company?

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit! Amen.*

[1] Not Only a Father: Talk of God as Mother in the Bible and Christian Tradition  
(website).