

Sermon Notes: March 16, 2025

Focus: Jesus the protector

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Luke 13:34 "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings."

At first glance, Jesus likening himself to a hen might seem soft and comforting. But just moments earlier, he calls Herod a cunning fox and Jerusalem a city that kills prophets. This isn't a cozy, plushy image—it's a fierce one. The hen in Jesus' metaphor is not a passive nurturer but a defender, willing to fight for her chicks.

Fierce Females: Bears Some of my favorite feminine images of God depict her as a fierce, protective mother. The prophet Hosea describes Yahweh as an enraged mama bear defending her cubs— "Like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will attack them and rip them open." (Hosea 13:8)

Since California, despite its flag, no longer has bears unless you head to the Sierras—and I'm not exactly the woodsy type—I haven't had a close encounter with one lately. But I have had plenty of run-ins with geese and turkeys, two creatures that embody maternal ferocity.

Geese At Oak Hill Park, geese rule the pond, and they do not take kindly to intruders. My favorite resident isn't a goose at all but a white duck with a pompadour, beloved by Monte Vista students. They called him George Washington. I used to call him Elvis. But now he is forever in my mind - Elvis Washington. One afternoon, as I stopped to admire him, I found myself suddenly under attack by a mother goose, charging from my left, wings spread, hissing. I had wandered too close to her chicks, and she was having none of it. Biblical maternal imagery is comforting, but not in the way of a plush toy. It speaks of a relentless commitment to justice, a refusal to tolerate harm to the vulnerable.

Then there are the mama turkeys While hiking Las Trampas, I was blissfully unaware of any animals until a skinny-necked turkey darted out of the brush. Aw, so cute, I thought—just before she charged, stabbing her beak toward me, forcing me off the trail. Only after I backed away did she return to her chicks and lead them safely down the ridge. That is the kind of mama-God energy we need on our side.

Desire in the Gospel The Greek word *thelō* (desire) appears three times in Luke 13, revealing different forms of longing:

Herod's desire: "Herod wants (thelō) to kill you." (Luke 13:31)

Fox Herod had no qualms about executing John the Baptist. His desire for power is built on violence, but ultimately, it is hollow. Jesus calls him a fox. Foxes are cunning, but they cannot outmaneuver the Kingdom of God.

Jesus' desire: "How often have I desired (thelō) to gather your children together..." (Luke 13:34)

Hen Jesus could have chosen a more majestic image—perhaps the eagle of Deuteronomy 32:11. But instead, he compares himself to a hen, offering refuge under her humble wings. His desire isn't for dominance, but for sacrificial love. Jesus' thelō does not prioritize his own safety. His divine purpose leads him into danger, not away from it.

*Jerusalem's lack of desire:
"You were not willing (thelō)..." (Luke 13:34)*

Jerusalem does not share Jesus' desire for protection and peace. Instead of embracing the prophets, the city stones them. Its leaders, under imperial rule, conspire to silence those who challenge their power. Jesus' critique is clear: those who criminalize truth-tellers betray their own people.

Desolation This unwillingness leads to disaster. Verse 35 underscores the consequences of rejecting God's desire Jerusalem's suffering. I offer different translations to highlight how difficult it is for us to find "original meaning" as English speakers who are reading a text copied many times over. Furthermore, these are text translated by many groups from Biblical Greek into English. But together they *kind of* get to the same place:

- NIV Look, your house is left to you desolate.
- KJV Behold, your house is left unto you desolate:
- MSG And now it's too late:
- NRSV your house is left to you

Despite the difference, each translation or paraphrase conveys the same stark reality—a lack of desire for God leads to desolation. A refusal to embody the care of a mother hen leaves us in an emotional and spiritual wilderness.

Desiring God I am praying to Mama Jesus—the fierce mother hen—to shelter her children, build barriers against oppression, and teach us how to practice peace. It is not a peace of passive neutrality, but a peace that protects, defends, and loves fiercely. **Todd**