

“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!” (Luke 13:34). That image of a hen will appear in front of our altar on Palm Sunday when our young children will carry in procession chicks on a stick—a custom we’ve had at Trinity for several years. That image is one that Luke’s Gospel writer uses to remind us of the yearning that God has to draw us closer into God’s embrace and love.

“St. Augustine says that there is no bird which conveys so completely the idea of an all-enfolding care. Her wings gather her whole brood till they are totally covered. Such is the spread of the love of Jesus for his whole flock. The caring gesture of the hen is constantly repeated—an unending gathering. How often does Jesus extend his arms in a universal embrace; yet how often is his gesture rejected!”¹

Yesterday many Trinity folks made it possible for us to embody the spreading of those wings and enfolding love for God’s people. Many of you donated food for socks. A host of folks gathered yesterday morning to make sandwiches and pack lunches for the poor in Hartford’s Bushnell Park. Fifteen of us headed to the Park with food to be distributed, extra food for the *Church Street Eats* program, and a huge bag of socks that will be distributed either today or next Sunday. The gift of a pair of socks to someone who walks the streets is precious as is the gift of food that we so often take for granted in our abundance. These actions translate into the spread of love. There was also a group of teens there from St. Paul’s, Southington, who were doing a hunger fast—embodying the spread of a hen’s wings while also feeling a taste of the pangs of hunger.

¹ John M.oney, *The Time Is Now: Thoughts of the Day* (Blackrock, CDublin: The Columba Press, 2001), 17.

Luke's Gospel reveals the stories of Jesus' embrace of many people on the margins of society or those cast out—the stories of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan, the man possessed with demons in the country of the Gerasenes, a woman suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years, a mute possessed by demons, a blind beggar by the roadside. Over and over he touched the untouchable. As if gathered by a hen's wingspread, they were enfolded with love and acceptance.

I think of the words of that wonderful communion hymn, *I Come with Joy to Meet My Lord* and its 2nd verse:

“I come with Christians far and near
to find, as all are fed,
the new community of love
in Christ's communion bread.”²

It is a new community of love that Jesus brings and embodies and teaches us to embody.

Jesus' ministry is centered on gathering God's people closer and closer to God's love—to heal the brokenhearted, to raise up those cast out, to welcome the rejected, to bring all to the knowledge and love of God. That's Jesus' mission. That's the mission to which you and I are called.

Michael Curry, bishop in the Episcopal Church writes about African slaves of antebellum America and says the following. “African slaves of antebellum America, by virtue of their servitude, were compelled to cast their ken beyond mere sight—to extend their vision beyond things as they were, to a deeper, broader, higher vision, and dream of things as they could be. Hence many of their sacred songs, the Negro spirituals, stretch the contours of reality as it is given in the social order, pointing to the firm of a new heaven and a new earth—a new social order, a new set of institutional arrangements—a kingdom not born of or

² *The Hymnal 1982*, 304.

controlled by the powers of this world. One of their spirituals describes the kingdom of God thus: ‘There’s plenty good room, plenty good room, plenty good room in my Father’s kingdom.’³

The wings of a hen outstretch ever and ever to let us know of the boundless reach of God’s love through Jesus to all people. By being in the receiving end of these wings and by embodying these wings we come to know there is plenty good room in God’s kingdom for all. We also come to know that we only rest in the arms of these wings for a while—long enough to get renewed and nourished to share it with others. For Jesus’ mission is never done, nor is ours.

I invite you into a time of pondering the warmth of these wings of a hen—to wonder about the times you’ve been embraced and times you have embraced others with their love—a time of thanksgiving and a time of living into God’s dream for us.

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³ David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C, Volume 2* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 69.