



Gathering the Brood



A Sermon By
The Rev. Canon Paula Clark

February 21, 2016

Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

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Luke 13:31-35

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The Second Sunday in Lent
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*Holy and just God, help us work to gather your brood under the protection of your wings.
AMEN.*

Good Morning! I am Paula Clark, Canon for Clergy Development, Multicultural Ministries and Justice. I am glad to be with you, Grace, as you have opened your doors to diocesan wide events, including ordinations and hosting the Trinity Institute conference last month. I have appreciated your leadership in justice ministry, as we endeavor to work together to bring about justice in our community, the nation and the world.

Also, I have ministered with Rev. Andrew and Rev. Amanda through our Multicultural Clergy Group known as MAGI, Multicultural Awareness of Gifts, Inc. Thank you for hosting the Good Friday service last year here at Grace. It was awesome. I have long admired your work, Grace, as a leader in multiculturalism in the Diocese of Washington. The late Rev. Janice Robinson, and former rector of Grace, was a founding member of MAGI. Your intentional efforts in celebrating and embracing multiculturalism are displayed in the quilts you made some years ago, and in looking at the current diversity represented in your pews. I applaud you.

This second Sunday in Lent's gospel presents us with a rather perplexing text. Rev. Andrew asked me to include in my remarks references to what the diocese is doing on the race and justice front, and I will get to that, but as a priest and a preacher, I couldn't resist engaging this text, even if it appeared a bit challenging.

In doing my research on this text, I came across a commentary by Bishop Michael Curry, written before he became presiding bishop, and I knew God sent me some insight on this passage.

Bishop Curry's commentary picked up on the same passage that piqued my interest this week when preparing my sermon. This gospel passage is often titled Jesus' lament over Jerusalem, and in it Jesus exclaims, "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!" The image Jesus uses of a hen gathering her brood under her wings is powerful – one that has stuck with me over the years. When I was in Jerusalem I visited a church where there was a depiction of a hen covering her chicks with her wings on the altar. That image has never left me, because the altar overlooked the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the very place of Jesus' lament.

This passage is especially difficult because although Jesus indicates he'd like to gather his children together like a hen gathers her brood, the people are unwilling to comply. Jesus' lament is ever so poignant, given the challenges that face him in Jerusalem.

I appreciate Bishop Curry's take on the passage because he puts a new spin on it, which I believe informs our social justice work, saying "For God's passionate dream, compassionate desire, and bold determination is to gather God's human children closer and closer in God's embrace and love. That mission and commitment is at the center of Jesus' work. Like a mother hen, God seeks to draw, embrace, include, and welcome God's children into the family of humanity that God has intended from the dawn of Eden itself."

This embrace and welcome of all God's children is why this passage speaks to our mission and commitment to social justice work. At the beginning of the passage Jesus is told by the Pharisees Herod wants to kill him. Jesus' not so politically correct response is, '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. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way...' Jesus is determined to carry out the work God has pre-ordained for him, and he won't let Herod or any other authority take him off track. Despite the danger, hardship, and imminent destruction planned for him, Jesus is about the work of God. Rather than denouncing the political establishment that resides and is in collusion with the authorities in Jerusalem, Jesus laments that he cannot protect and care for them. What a counter-cultural response! It's a reaction of compassion and care, rather than vindication. In this political season we don't hear very much about care and protection of our political opponents! Jesus desires that ALL God's children be gathered together under the love and protection of God's wings.

Indeed, that is what justice work is all about. It's about gathering the marginalized, the outcast, the voiceless and the forgotten under God's wings, and ensuring justice for all.

We in the diocese are working to ensure justice for all so that all God's children are covered by the protection of God's wings. We have worked for marriage equality, gun control, immigration reform, especially in the Latino community, and spoken on Capitol Hill, at the Supreme Court, and other places of political authority on behalf of immigrant children. We have re-instituted our Race and Social Justice training, called "Seeing the Face of God in each other," which will continue quarterly this year. We provide support to parishes wanting to institute racial reconciliation conversations. We have discussed policing and its impact on people of color. The Rev. Gayle Fisher-Stewart was here last year, as a former police captain, explaining the question of police brutality is not merely black and white, but "Blue," focusing on police indoctrination. This weekend we are hosting the grandfather of multicultural ministry, the Rev. Dr. Eric Law, in a two day workshop, so in our churches we can be intentional in fully including people of diverse backgrounds in church leadership.

Last summer the diocese sponsored a pilgrimage led by Bishop Mariann to study and experience our Civil Rights history, and pay homage to Jonathan Daniels on the 50th anniversary of his martyrdom. Daniels was an Episcopal Divinity School seminarian gunned down in Alabama while working on behalf of voting rights.

While in Montgomery, Alabama, I sat in the office chair of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. Earlier in the day, I had been intimidated into leaving a Stuckey's restaurant that had the confederate battle flag prominently displayed at the front door and more confederate flags flanking the cash register. I was discouraged, and thinking about how far we still have to go as a nation in race relations when I almost heard King whispering in my ear that I and all of us must continue to persevere. The whisper was not unlike what Jesus was saying in today's Gospel. No matter the obstacles, threats and danger, you have to keep working for the kingdom, "casting out demons, performing cures." Heaven knows, King knew all about working for justice and equality in the face of real and present danger.

What I take away from today's Gospel is that all of us who believe in doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with our God are called to persevere in working to bring all God's brood together, in peace and equality. You, Grace, must continue to stand up for justice, and we in the diocese will stand up too, supporting and working with you, as we all seek justice for all. While we, like Jesus, might lament the state of affairs in our nation, we must also, like Jesus, continually persevere in pursuing justice, so that ALL God's children can live protected under the shadow of God's wings. AMEN.