



March 2024 Message for Congregations and Lay and Rostered Leaders

Dear Beloved of God –

May grace and peace be yours in abundance (1 Peter 1:2a).

On the western slope of the Mount of Olives, just across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem, sits a small chapel, *Dominus Flevit*, from the Latin: *Dominus* – “the Lord”; *Flevit* – “wept.” The name of the chapel comes from Luke’s Gospel, which contains not one but two accounts (13:31f; 19:41f) of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. According to tradition, it was here, that Jesus wept over the city.

Inside the chapel, the altar is centered before a high arched window that looks out over the city of Jerusalem. Iron grillwork divides the view into sections, so that on a sunny day the effect is that of a stained-glass window except that what you see through the window is not colored glass, not an artist’s rendering of the holy city, but the city itself, with the Dome of the Rock in the bottom left corner and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the center.

Down below, on the front of the altar, is a picture, a mosaic medallion of a white hen with a golden halo around her head. Her red comb resembles a crown, and her wings are spread wide to shelter the pale, yellow chicks that crowd around her feet. There are seven of them, with black dots for eyes and orange dots for beaks. They look happy to be there. The hen looks ready to spit fire if anyone comes near her babies.

And around the edge of the medallion is a Latin text written in red: “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 last phrase of this text is set outside of the circle, in a pool of red underneath the chicks’ feet: *you were not willing*. Jesus’ words of lament: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem...;” of yearning: “How often have I desired to gather your children...;” of rejection: “And you were not willing.”

Lament, yearning, rejection – for the city of Jerusalem, which Jesus sees across the valley, is a city like a chicken coop filled with pale, yellow chicks and at least one fox – Herod.

Jesus weeps over the city seeing that some of the chicks have taken to following the fox around. Others are huddled out in the open where anything with claws can get to them: helpless, unsafe, unprotected.

And Jesus, standing on the hillside, looking across the valley weeping, is like a white hen with a golden halo around her head who is clucking for all she is worth. Most of the chicks cannot hear her, and the ones that do make no response or ignore her clucking call.

Raised on the farm in the days when chickens often roamed freely around the chicken coop, I have seen how a mother hen gathers her brood in protection if it began to rain or if the rooster was let loose or if it was dusk and time to settle down for the night or if the dog came to close. The hen's wings were large and seemed to expand to cover a surprisingly large number of chicks. The hen would simply cluck and somehow the chicks would know to gather under her wings. And not once did I see a chick ignore the hen.

But here, Jesus laments because the brood is unwilling to be gathered. This hen clucks and raises her wings but they do not come, they do not gather. And Jesus weeps.

The depth of his love, his lament, is profound – beyond words. Wings spread, breast exposed, he stands open in the most vulnerable posture in the world. Vulnerable to the dangerous, fearful, deathly work of this fox in the chicken coop, for if the fox wants them the fox will have to kill the hen first.

Which the fox does, as it turns out. He slides up on her one night in the yard while all the babies are asleep. When her cry wakens them, they scatter. She dies the next day where both fox and chicks can see her – wings spread; breast exposed.

In a few short days, in Jerusalem, this lament, this weeping will echo throughout the city and throughout all time. The compassion of God will be exposed for the entire world to see. For in Jerusalem, Jesus, like a mother hen spreading her wings to gather and protect her chicks, will spread his arms on the cross, spread them wide enough to embrace the world, spread them wide enough to embrace us for all time.

The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).

In Christ Jesus –
Shalom,
+ Larry