

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Before I launch into the sermon, let me welcome you and share how happy I am on this day. For one thing, our son Sam is home from college for spring break. For another, two of our dearest friends from Pennsylvania — Pastor Bill Snyder and his son Chris — are visiting our city this weekend and are here at Immanuel today. But chiefly, I am happy because of you! You are the debut Sunday morning congregation for our new church doors. We mean to say the prayers of dedication for these new doors a few weeks down the road, when we can expect the weather to be nice. But even before then, let me speak of the noble ambition behind these doors. They are glass doors, meant to let a harassed and weary world at least *see* into our church, all the way up to our rear altarpiece, and in seeing might find themselves beckoned into Christ. These are doors lonely and longing for people. They will not be content until more and more people come walking on through them. Or better put, our resurrected Lord Jesus is lonely and longing for people to come to him. Something is afoot here at Immanuel. We hope you will invite people to church.

My text for this morning is the lament of Jesus over Jerusalem. He contemplates that town where he knows he will die, and he laments not for himself, but for the town. What large-heartedness! Hear his words again:

³⁴O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood

under her wings, and you would not!(Luke 13:34)

A few verses earlier in our text we read of a warning concerning King Herod, tetrarch of Galilee. “Flee from here,” the warning goes, “for Herod means to harm you.” But Jesus has no time for Herod, nor do we in this sermon. Herod is but a fox. Not a lion, not a bear, but a conniving fox. Jesus is indeed leaving Galilee, but not because he fears Herod. Oh! Our Lord fears *something*, but it is not Herod. What he fears is that you will be harmed. He fears that sin, death, and the devil will vanquish you, and he is determined to prevent that. So, he presses on with determined step toward Jerusalem to entry the fray against humanity’s enemies.

Jesus, then, goes his way. But before we set out with him, let’s linger some with his lament for that town. He speaks of Jerusalem using the countryside image of the mother hen and her brood of chicks. I think it a remarkable image, akin to the more famous image of the Good Shepherd and his sheep.

In particular, I seem to see three facets to this treasure — the treasure of Jesus as a mothering hen.

- 1) First, it is a wonderfully gentle and sovereign way to refer to grown-ups: as chicks, as peeps.
- 2) Second, this image speaks of Jesus as a protector of his brood. He is brave, he is valiant. He counts his chicks so precious to him that he can never forget nor neglect them. He protects his brood with his wings.

3) And third — a sorrowful idea: Sometimes, the mother hen is overmatched. Sometimes she must pay the ultimate price in the course of protecting the chicks. Christ does this for you, for you are that important to him.

So, first, let us notice how gentle and how kingly Jesus is in referring to Jerusalem as a brood of chicks needing his protection. That town of long ago is like our town now: It contains many grown-ups — people who would never think of themselves as a brood of chicks. I remember chicks from the farmyard of my youth. Around Easter time, I think we can see them here in the city, in the windows of pet stores. They are little soft blurs of yellow feathers. What grown-up among us would think of ourselves as a chick?

In that ancient town of Jerusalem there were mighty men and women. There were probably military men with the bearing and authority of Patton played by George C. Scott. They had seen war. They had seen battle. They had commanded men to fight, knowing that many of those men would die in the battle. They were accustomed to authority and command. Mighty commanders, yes, but Jesus thinks of them as little chicks.

In that town, there were probably wealthy people — even captains of industry. They know about management. They know about the coordination of talents. They know how to inspire and encourage. They know how to get the job done. They are grown-ups. They have years of accomplishment behind them. Yet Jesus considers them peeps, and worries about them.

In that town, as in ours, there were scholars. There were people who had drunk deeply from the springs of learning. They know more than the rest of us do. They hear us speak of politics or history or mathematics or art, and they know that we are superficial, that we have not studied the subjects enough. Only their grace and politeness holds them

back from correcting us. They have used their gifts of mind and research, and they have become wise. They are mature. Yet Jesus counts them chicks in need of his protection.

In that town there were people with power — people who with the wave of a hand or an uplifted eyebrow could command soldiers to arrest a man lost in prayer in a garden, and it would be done. There were financial giants who with a flick of a wrist could grant employment to someone or withdraw that employment.

Jerusalem was like New York City: It contained a lot of grown ups and a lot of strong people. Yet, Jesus knew it to be a town in need of his salvation.

And so, if you are one who bears heavy responsibilities in this town, know that Jesus is willing to look at you and to see you as you are: a chick, sometimes running around as if in search of your head. Bear your responsibilities as best you can, but know that Jesus is aware of your troubles and your weaknesses and would gather you together under his wing to protect you. You never become too big for Jesus to see and to care for.

Before Jesus, then, none of us needs to put on airs. From the biggest to the littlest of us, Jesus counts us chicks who need protection. He counts us children who need to be able to refer to God as “Our Father,” and he authorizes us to do so.

Second, let us note that the deepest desire of our Lord’s heart concerning Jerusalem is to protect that town. He would be the town’s protector. He would be the town’s mothering hen.

Of all the ways Jesus could have related to Jerusalem, he comes with the hope to protect. He who is master of wind and waves and all the forces of God’s creation could have come to Jerusalem to conquer that town. He who has authority over twelve legions of angels certainly had enough fire power to subdue that city, but that is not why he came.

He did not come to rule the city, he came to rule the Church and to rule you.

Or, he who had astonished the teachers in the Temple with “his understanding and his answers” when he was but a mere boy could have come to Jerusalem with the intention to be the editor of the biggest, most influential newspaper or theological journal going, but that is not why he comes to Jerusalem, nor to you. He does not come to demonstrate his brilliance, but to save.

Or, he who had healed the sick, cast out demons, and raised the dead, could have come to Jerusalem with the intention to establish the grandest medical practice around. The townsfolk could have come flowing toward him, knocking on his door, banging on his door, offering all their money to him. And certainly Jesus does care about your body and about your health. But he does not come to the city simply to save your body, but also your life! He is the Great Physician of your body, yes, but also of your soul, which no other physician can save. Only he can.

He did not come to condemn, but to forgive sin and to say to the forgiven sinner, Go, and sin no more.

He does not come to the city with any intention except this: to save, to protect, to gather his brood under his protecting wing.

The traditional enemies of humanity are these three: sin, death, and the devil. We will speak of the last two in the final section of this sermon, but now let us praise Jesus for his protection against the first-named of our enemies: sin. Jesus comes to the city to protect us from sin.

You might remember this theme from last Sunday’s sermon about temptation. It is a theme I have preached before and mean to preach henceforth: sin is suffering. Sin is depletion of your humanity. Sin is deprivation. Sin is misery. Sin is automatically the falling short of your destiny and of your nobility. And Jesus always come to the city, to the Church, and to you and me to save us from

sin. He means to protect us from sin’s squalor. He means to set us on our feet and call us upward. He means to lead us in adventure upon adventure, every step of the way with the potential to become more virtuous and more saintly. Jesus is a mother hen who among other protections, means to protect us from lives unworthy of us. If we walk with him, that is what he will do for us.

So, Jesus comes to the city with the aim to protect.

And now we come to the Lent theme, the theme of the Cross. Sometimes, the protecting hen is overmatched. Some eagles are so strong, some hawks so fierce, some falcons so fast and bullet-like that the mother hen could die protecting her brood. In fact, nearly any big enemy, like a wolf or a man with an ax, is enough to defeat the poor hen.

And out there in this world there are mighty enemies. Indeed, there is the devil:

Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.(I Peter 5:8)

If the enemy is big and strong enough, I suspect that all hens in the farmyard can be driven away. But Jesus is distinguished from them in that he will not be driven away from his mission to save you. If he must die for you, then he will die. If nails and spears will pierce him, then under his protecting wing, at least you will be safe. If he must cover you with his dead body, then he will cover you.

That is always his nature. And the Gospel is that this protecting determination of Jesus is so pleasing to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit that they raised Jesus up and elevated him to sovereignty. He lives, determined to protect you still. He lives to welcome you.

This Thirteenth Chapter of St. Luke is filled with woes and worrisome language. The fruitless fig tree risks being cut down. Workers of iniquity will be turned out, even

though they might claim to have known Jesus. There will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. And in our passage itself, there is prophecy of a terrible event for Jerusalem: that her house will be left “desolate and empty.” Why, because she “would not.” She would not let Jesus protect her as a mother hen protects her brood. This refers to the mystery of free spirits. They “would not.” And because they would not, they expose themselves to the troubles of sin, death, and the devil.

But I can hardly refrain myself from noting a final word of hope in this chapter. It is the word “blessed”:

And verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. (Luke 13:35, KJV)

Maybe this refers to Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem, when people will wave their palm branches and say, Blessed. But maybe there is an even deeper meaning to it. Maybe it reflects the eternal meaning of Jesus: that he always comes to seek and to save the lost... that he is forever the mother hen.... that when he is stern or when he is gentle, he is always out to protect us.

Some people cannot bless Jesus now. For whatever reasons, innocent or sinful, they cannot yet say, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” But there will come a time when every knee on earth and in heaven and under the earth will bow before Jesus and find their hearts forming the great confession, Blessed.

We are free to practice saying that even now. We are free to connect our lives and our happiness with Jesus. We are free to consider him the Blessed One, and in so doing, to begin or renew our life in Him, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.