

Sanctuary

A Shelter of the Love of God

The sermon given at the Parish Communion Service on 17 March 2019 by the Associate Vicar, the Revd. Wendy Wales, in Beverley Minster.

Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 13: 31-end

In my ideal world...I'd deliver this sermon with a live chicken under my arm....however, I don't possess a chicken and even if I did.... There's a high chance it would flap away and the consequences could be messy. Thankfully, the Minster shop has a solution for almost every problem....so meet my friend for the duration!

Any of you who have ever kept chickens will know, the number one challenge is keeping the foxes at bay - foxes will go to any lengths to track down and obtain their supper - my friend Liz is an avid environmentalist and has twice kept chickens in a secure cage in the garden ...they were loved providers of eggs and cuddles....until the fox got them, both of them....twice. I won't go into details, although they aren't quite as bad as the badger and the guinea pig story.... Liz tells me that they won't have any more pets as their garden felt too much like a fast food shop!

Chickens are vulnerable....but they are also fiercely protective- they keep their chicks close, especially in times of danger. If you have a spare moment there are some lovely you tube clips of hens puffing out their wings to shelter the chicks from the rain or to hide them from a predator- hens are like most mothers I know and would do anything to keep their young from harm.

In our gospel reading today Jesus describes himself as a mother hen - not only a hugely powerful picture of the feminine, motherly characteristics of God, but also a prophetic picture of his impending journey to Jerusalem.

Herod the fox is prowling, but Jesus makes it clear he has no power to interrupt his ministry until the allotted time – “on the third day I finish my work.”

Jesus calls out to Jerusalem - and he calls them harshly. "You kill the prophet, stone those who are sent to you...if only you would let yourself be gathered under my wings" ...

Jesus longs to provide a shelter from the storm and yet people run towards danger. How relevant is this passage for us today. So much of our world seems to be filled with scattered chicks and hungry foxes - Mother Hen God, heart-broken that she is being ignored.

I don't know about you but I cannot stop thinking about the horrific mosque shooting in New Zealand on Friday. Innocent people, gathered just like us to offer prayers and worship to God, slaughtered indiscriminately and out of nowhere. My heart is broken for the families, the country and fact we live in a world where fear of the other and of difference has become a reason to destroy innocent lives.

There are 2 stories that have emerged from the attack that particularly struck me as I re-wrote this talk in light of events. Firstly, a worshipper called Neem Rashid rushed towards the shooter, unarmed, part way through the attack - seeking to cover him and thus protect others from further harm. Like the mother hen, Neem put the needs of his fellow human beings first, sacrificing his own life to protect others, preventing the death toll being even higher than it already is.

Secondly, Andrew Greystone, a British Christian stood outside Medina Mosque in Manchester holding a plaque that read 'You are my friends. I will keep watch while you pray.' Andrew said to the BBC that he was surprised the media were interested- he was simply offering a small act of kindness to his local neighbours - concerned that his local community were able to worship without fear. Andrew, an interfaith chaplain, believes that a place of worship should be a community of love and belonging where people can shelter under the wings of the Almighty - and then go out and offer that same love and welcome to those around them.

So our world needs to know the protection of the mother hen and so does our community:

As many of you will be aware, we are exploring here in Beverley Minster, what it means to be a place of Sanctuary - a community of love and belonging where people can come and hide under the wings of the love of God, expressed in many different ways by many different people. I have heard of people who simply come and sit in the building every week, sensing the presence of God, absorbing the peace. I know that for others attending services and receiving the bread and the wine or a blessing, is a reminder that our lives are hidden in Christ - that his loving wing is always over us, even when we sense danger is all around.

However, not everyone would automatically think of the Minster, or any church as a place to turn to in difficult times or a place to shelter from the storms of life. There are people in the streets where we live, the places where we work and the places we visit to eat, shop or receive treatments that won't know the love and shelter of our mothering God unless we demonstrate it to them. I wonder what difference it would make if each of us here committed, like Andrew outside the mosque, to demonstrate love towards someone we don't know, someone different from us or someone we don't even like.....

There are simple gestures like buying a copy of the big issue or saying hello to someone in a queue or waiting room. Some might be able to pay for someone's coffee or could phone the friend they've been avoiding for a long time. It could be the gentlest whisper in someone's ear, encouraging them to keep going or hang in there.

We could commit to reading about, praying for or volunteering with our refugee community through an organization like Open Doors in Hull or the Children's Society who we heard about earlier this year.

Meg Choules told me about an amazing local charity called SASH which helps homeless young people in the North East - exploring their website offers many different ways to make a practical difference, aware that in our local community drugs, boredom, mental health struggles and poverty are a reality for many young people.

You could join the online conversation about the environment or mental health through our Living Logos group- or chat to Tony Kelham about our up and coming environmental audit.

You could perhaps invite a young family along to our Mothering Sunday service or tell them about our Time Out group for families and carers of young children.

I have an image of Beverley Minster as a huge hen (big enough to keep the peregrine falcon at bay!) with wings that stretch across Beverley and beyond, overlapping with the wings of other local Christian communities - demonstrating the love and care of God to our friends and neighbours - whatever their creed, colour, age, background or status in life.

But finally, there will no doubt be several of us here today or listening online who need the shelter of the love of God themselves at this time. You may be battling mental or physical health issues, worried about loved ones, exhausted, overwhelmed or wrestling with broken and painful relationships. Lent is a period of repentance and it maybe that some of us, myself included, may need to reflect on the failure to stand still in the presence of God, to submit to, receive and live in all the gifts that God intends for us. This may need to be our starting point before allowing God to lead us out to shine a light in the darkness.

Philippians 3:17-4:1

17 Brothers and sisters,[a] join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. 18 For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. 19 Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship[b] is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. 21 He will transform the body of our humiliation[c] that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. 4 1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

Luke 13: 31-end

31 At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." 32 He said to them, "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. 33 Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' 34 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! 35 See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"