

Under Her Wings
Rev. Cindy Maddox
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Luke 13:31-35

Last Sunday I called the Bible passage for the week “weird.”
In this week’s Chronicle I called the Bible passage for today
“beautiful but difficult.”

(You’re probably starting to get a pretty good glimpse
of my relationship with the Bible!)

Today’s passage is difficult because it includes a much-needed metaphor
but also threats of violence,
a statement that seems to be put in the wrong time and place,
and another that has been used to promote antisemitism.

The author accomplishes quite a bit in just five verses!

Let’s start, as the passage does, with the threats of violence.

Some Pharisees come to Jesus and say,

“Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.”

We’re not sure if they’re telling the truth—

they might just be trying to get rid of Jesus—

but it would not be out of character for Herod.

“Herod had killed John the Baptist.

It is very believable that he also wanted to remove Jesus.

The eastern flank of the Roman empire was unstable.

When you are trying to maintain stability and security,

the last thing you want is popular movements critical of government. . . .

People like John and Jesus brought unrest.”¹

Jesus responds to the news that Herod wants to kill him
by saying, “Go tell that fox,

‘I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow,
and on the third day I will reach my goal.’”

In other words: *It doesn’t matter if you want to kill me.*

I’m not backing down.

¹ Loader, William. “First Thoughts on Year C.”

*In fact, here's my itinerary for the next three days.
Your threats of violence will not stop me.*

I am reminded of President Zelensky of Ukraine,
who has taken a similar approach with Russia.
You want to kill me? I'm in Kyiv. Here's video to prove it.
I'm not running.

I like this Jesus.
This is no meek and mild Jesus but a "Bring it on!" Jesus.
"You want me? Come and get me. Cause I'm not stopping!"

I like this Jesus.
I want the power of this Jesus.
I want the courage and the audacity of this Jesus.
Think of the most critical person in your life—
the boss who is never satisfied with your work
the colleague who'll do anything to make you look bad
the parent or sibling or adult child who you never seem to please.
Now, wouldn't you like to possess the power of Jesus to say,
"This is who I am. You don't like it? Not my problem.
You are not gonna' change me or stop me."

I like this "Bring it on" Jesus. I like him a lot.

I think Mark Driscoll probably does, too.
As you may know, Mark Driscoll was the founder of the now defunct
Mars Hill Church, which started in Seattle in 1996
and grew into fifteen locations in five states, with 14,000 members.
(This is different from the Mars Hill Church started in Michigan
by Rob Bell, which still exists.)
Driscoll "was named one of the 25 most influential pastors of the past 25 years
by *Preaching* magazine in 2010,
and his audio sermon podcast [was] regularly #1
on iTunes' Religion & Spirituality chart."²
"Driscoll has been described as

² <http://marshill.com/pastors/mark-driscoll>

‘an evangelical bad boy, a gifted orator and [a] charismatic leader’ who is ‘hip yet hard-line’.”³

This is what Driscoll had to say about Jesus:

“There is a strong drift toward the hard theological left. Some emergent types [want] to recast Jesus as a limp-wrist hippie in a dress with a lot of product in His hair, who drank decaf and made pithy Zen statements about life while shopping for the perfect pair of shoes. In Revelation, Jesus is a pride fighter with a tattoo down His leg, a sword in His hand, and the commitment to make someone bleed. That is a guy I can worship. I cannot worship the hippie, diaper, halo Christ because I cannot worship a guy I can beat up.”⁴

Wow. Not long after he made these statements, 21 former elders brought charges against Driscoll for his bullying and intimidating behavior. You become the God you adore.

So now I have to go back and revisit that “Bring it on, Jesus,” because I didn’t get it quite right. The “Bring it on” Jesus is not saying “bring on the punches,” and it’s not just bravery or audacity. It’s about clarity. Jesus is clear about his identity and his mission. So he is saying “Go ahead with your accusations and threats. I’m not going to be stopped. I’m going to keep on healing and restoring and setting people free.”

And he’ll be doing that on the way to Jerusalem. The tone changes in the next verse, as he says, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you.” This is not an insult against Judaism or Jewish people. Jesus is making a point about Jerusalem as the center of religious and cultural life for his people.

³ Wikipedia

⁴ As quoted on <http://www.inhabitiodei.com/2008/05/09/who-can-mark-driscoll-worship/>

It would be like us saying, “Oh Washington, DC!
 How you love to destroy those who want to save you!”
 He is, as a Jew, referring to the fact that throughout their history,
 their people had not always been kind to their prophets—
 just like most groups of people being told things they don’t want to hear.

Finally we get to the good part of this passage.

The beautiful, heartwarming, comforting part
 for which you’ve been waiting.

Verse 34 continues: “How often I have longed to gather your children together,
 as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.”

I’ve always loved this image.

The metaphor of a protective mom is particularly poignant right now.
 It’s poignant for many of us, and especially women
 who are hungry for female images in the Bible.

According to one scholar,

only 93 women speak in the Bible, only 49 of whom are named.

These women speak a total of 14,056 words collectively—
 roughly 1.1% of the Bible.⁵

Representation matters.

And it is so hard for women to see themselves in the Bible,
 that we need every positive female image we can get.

But it’s not just female-identifying people who need this image.

We all do.

We all need to know we are sheltered in love.

And we all need to know that Jesus is not a prize fighter.

We need to know that Christ will not fight our battles.

Jesus chose a loving, protective, but rather small animal for his metaphor.

I know that hens can be tough.

They will protect their chicks,
 and their beaks and talons can do some damage.

But they’re still not very big.

In the whole 25-book series of *Who Would Win* children’s books,
 pairing different animals in epic battles,

⁵ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/love-and-belonging> Karoline Lewis quoting Lindsay Hardin Freeman, *Bible Women: All Their Words and Why They Matter*

there's not a single chicken. (I checked.)

And sometimes I want more than a hen.

Sometimes I want a mama bear God.

Sometimes I want to be kept safe.

I want protection from all dangers.

Sometimes I want to think God will be my safe place to hide.

Especially now, when there's so much trouble in the world.

And not just for myself, either.

I want a mama bear God to protect the people of Ukraine.

I want a mama bear God to protect the people of Ethiopia, Myanmar, Syria,
and everywhere there is war.

I want a mama bear God to protect trans kids in Texas
and the parents of trans kids who could be charged with abuse
for trying to help their own children live authentically.

I want a mama bear God for them.

I want a mama bear God for girls and women pregnant through violence
who by the time they find out they're pregnant,
can't choose a safe way to stop it.

I want a mama bear God.

And occasionally, when the pains of the world weigh heaviest,

sometimes I am even tempted to want Mark Driscoll's tough guy Jesus.

But Jesus chose a mother hen.

The mother hen cannot promise safety.

What the mother hen offers under her wings is shelter.

Come in here out of the rain.

The mother hen offers community.

Come here when you're scared, along with everybody else who is scared,
and we'll face it together.

The mother hen offers belonging.

It doesn't matter what flock you come from, you're welcome here.

I've read that hens will do that.

They will offer shelter to chicks other than their own.

That's what mama hens do.

I'm sure you've heard the story of Jamal Hinton and Wanda Dench,
even if you don't remember their names.

In 2016, Wanda Dench sent a text message
 to a number she thought belonged to her grandson
 to invite him to Thanksgiving dinner at her home in Mesa, Arizona.
 Turns out, she accidentally texted Jamal Hinton, a complete stranger at the time.
 Jamal asked who was texting him, and Wanda sent a photo of herself—
 a white woman in her mid fifties.
 The young black man replied, “You not my grandma. Can I still get a plate tho?”
 She texted back: “Of course. That's what grandmas do ... feed everyone.”
 This year they celebrated their sixth Thanksgiving dinner together.

That’s what grandmas do . . . they feed everyone.
 That’s what mother hens do . . . they shelter everyone.
 And they don’t stop.

When the Pharisees told Jesus to flee from Herod’s threat,
 Jesus is quoted as saying, “I will keep on driving out demons and healing people.”

Poet Sarah Speed puts it this way:

*“I will keep on.”
 That’s what I heard him say.
 I will keep on
 driving out demons
 and healing people,
 speaking the truth
 and loving endlessly,
 searching for the lost sheep
 and crying for the brokenhearted,
 feeding the hungry
 and welcoming the outcast.
 “I will keep on.”
 That’s what he said, right
 after he said my name, right
 after he called me beloved, right
 after he welcomed me home
 and saved me a seat.
 And I knew,*

*there was no stopping him.
I was under his wing.
Come rain or come shine,
today and tomorrow,
this love keeps on.*

And so it does.

And so do we.

When we are clear on our identity as a progressive voice in Northfield,
we don't let obstacles stop us.

We keep on.

When we are clear on our mission to live out
the courageous love and justice of Jesus,
we don't stop in the face of opposition.

We keep on.

When we hear of outrageous and dangerous laws,
we don't just wring our hands.

We sign petitions and make calls
and we widen our welcome here at home
like a mother hen gathering all chicks under her wings.

When justice is threatened, we take the next step. And the next.

And we keep on . . .

keep stepping, keep marching,
keep calling, voting, giving, praying.

We keep on.

It's what we do.

It's who we are.