

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

March 17, 2019
Second Sunday in Lent, Year C

The readings this week:

- Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18 ◦ Psalm 27
- Philippians 3:17 - 4:1 ◦ Luke 13:31-35

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

A Fierce Refuge

Once there was a little red hen who found a handful of grain in the barnyard... Remember that story? [Read it here.](#)

Why in the world would we tell this story with these texts and even in worship? A simple, repetitive 19th century children's story primarily promoting the virtues of good work ethic?

Our scriptures this week give us images of a God of fierce refuge. A God who will not let us blithely live life with simple answers. A God who promises refuge and new life in surprising, unexpected and risky ways. Abraham thinks that because God has not yet given him an heir he can designate his own and solve God's problem of keeping God's promise. God announces very dramatically that he is wrong! He must wait on God's timing and the promise will be fulfilled. In Psalm 27 the psalmist cries out for God's help in what seems to be dire circumstances. God has helped before and the psalmist stakes his or her very life on God's present and future help. "Wait for the Lord." Paul echoes the psalmist urging the church of Philippi to stand firm in God even when challenged by enemies of Christ whose "god is the belly", a god of consumerism and the power of greed. What does this God of fierce – not always easy – refuge have to do with the little red hen?



I was reminded of this story by Jesus' use of the imagery of the mother hen brooding over her chicks in our gospel text this week. Jesus, in the midst God's work of healing and teaching, building the Kingdom of God, looks at Jerusalem, the center of Jewish faith – and supposedly faithfulness – and sees people who are too scared or

lazy to join in the fierce work of the Kingdom. Jesus is grieved by the lack of participation and even the hostility of Jerusalem toward the prophets that come to offer healing and vision. I imagine that the little red hen in the story is saddened as well by the lack of participation from her friends in the life-giving work of transforming grain into bread. Mixed with the grief there must be a certain amount of anger. But I hear mostly great, great sorrow from Jesus and the hen. "Look," says Jesus to Herod, the Jewish governor, "I am casting out demons and performing cures. I am immersed God's work of healing and wholeness! Peoples' lives are being transformed. And you can be too. Yet you – with the resources of your privileged life – cannot join in?!" Jesus is willing to share the grace of his God-given powers of healing even as he grieves the obvious fact that it seems hardest for those who have the most in worldly wealth and

power to accept God's grace and to join in its transformative work in the world.

The little red hen must also wonder if the grace of sharing will be the most effective way to motivate her friends to help her do the work of transforming grain into bread. I imagine that she wonders if an open invitation to share the bread at her table will ultimately be a transformative invitation? The original writers of the story of the little red hen were not concerned with sharing but with teaching the lesson that one must work for one's daily bread. In more contemporary tellings the story ends with the hen sharing the bread with her friends despite their lack of help. Working for a living is not a bad lesson. It is true even in the realm of God that we experience more grace when we invest ourselves deep and deeper into God's work.

However it is also true that God's grace is free and abundant to all! Next week we will hear the words of Isaiah exhorting the people, "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food." (Isaiah 55:1-2.) Does the hen have an opportunity to give witness to abundance by sharing with her friends? Can they learn to invest themselves in the work by first tasting of its fruits? Is this true in the Kingdom of God?

Jesus says to Jerusalem, "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Luke 13:34b). Jesus, who is God with us in the flesh, gives us the image of God as a mother hen longing to protect and nurture her children. A mother's love can be a fierce refuge. As the mother of young adults I know the yearning to protect my sons, to still provide for them in some way. While it was appropriate for me to shelter them from harm and to feed them at all costs when they were young, now that they are young adults it is more important to challenge them to the risks of being fully immersed in life and in the work of God's realm. Could this be the yearning of God in Jesus? God wants to provide for our well-being. Yet this may mean challenging us to step out of comfort zones and into transformation.

How will you end the story of the little red hen? Are there people in your congregation that are little red hens – feeding others with God's extravagant love and inviting them into God's realm? Teaching others to risk the work of transformation? Will telling their story inspire others? The little red hen – a story we thought was only for children turns out to be more challenging than we thought.

Blessings on your Lenten story journey,

~ Jane Anne Ferguson, [Sermon Stories](#)



Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

What are some situations in your life that felt impossible? How did God speak to Abram and what promise did He give him? What problem did Abram have regarding God's promise? What solution did he propose? What did God say about Abram's solution? What promise did God repeat to Abram in 15:5,7? Where else have we read this? How did Abram respond to this promise? Do you think Abram and Sarai believed God right away, or do you think it took some time? Despite his faith, what request did Abram make of God? What did God tell Abram to do to prepare for the revelation God intended to give? Have you ever looked to the heavens and thought about counting stars? What message does Christ have for you in the stars? When is the last time you went out and gazed upon the stars? If it's been awhile, take the opportunity to do it soon. [Bible Study Lessons](#)

Psalm Reading: Psalm 27

What are the greatest sources of fear in your life? What is your normal pattern for responding to these fears? What does David mean when he says the Lord is his "light"? How is the Lord David's "salvation" and "stronghold"? Why are these characteristics of God so important to David? What difference do these characteristics of God have on David's perspective of his current situation? Why did David desire such fellowship with God? Why do you think David changes his tone from verses 7-9 to verse 10? What did David ask for when enemies and false witnesses rose against him? What prevented David from losing heart? Belief in the Lord's "goodness" caused David to patiently wait for the Lord even when times were difficult. How has the Lord's goodness helped you to patiently wait for the Lord in similar situations? [Radical Experiment](#)

TODAY, TOMORROW, AND THE THIRD DAY

Today where sun rises on hills of fresh sorrow
tomorrow where stars set upon fields of old pain
we will do the day's work to bring comfort and healing
for this is Christ's labour, fulfilled the third day

Today where souls suffer, despairing and fearful
tomorrow where whole lives are crushed under strain
we will do the day's work to bring peace, to bring courage
for this is Christ's labour, fulfilled the third day

Today where the parched and scarred earth yields no bounty
tomorrow where war-weary ground gives no grain
we will do the day's work to bring hope to the hungry
for this is Christ's labour, fulfilled the third day.

~ Andrew King, [A Poetic Kind of Place](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

One thing...Jesus

One thing...Jesus
I take heart

When darkness descends

One thing...Jesus
I yearn

One Light...Jesus

When enemies attack
One Savior...Jesus

One thing...Jesus
I wait

When I am left alone
One Friend...
Jesus

One thing...Jesus

~ an excerpt by Bill & Kristi Gaultiere,
[Soul Shepherding](#)

3rd Reading: Philippians 3:17 - 4:1

Paul gives three commands in this passage, what are they? What perspectives does Paul offer to help the believer stand firm? Paul says about the enemies of the cross of Christ that they have their minds "set on earthly things". Obviously we all have to think about getting an education, earning a living, finding a spouse, taking care of our possessions. What is the difference between having a mind "set" on these things versus just thinking about them to be responsible? We often talk about ourselves as being "saved," i.e. past tense. What aspects of our salvation are still pending, according to this passage or others? Why is it important to always remember that our salvation is not fully accomplished? How might forgetting this contribute to someone not persevering in their walk with Christ? In what ways are you still trying to live as if this life is where you need to find your happiness and fill your belly? In what areas of your life do you need to remember that you are no longer a slave to the god of your bellies, but that Christ has set you free and that you have a hope far more desirable? [Cru](#)

4th Reading: Luke 13:31-35

What burdens are you carrying this Lent on your spiritual path? Why do we think the Pharisees came to warn Jesus? Why did Herod think Jesus was a threat to him? How does Jesus define his role in response to Herod? What assures Jesus that he will be killed and in Jerusalem? If you had been asked to make a list of images of Jesus before today, how far up your list would you have placed "a hen and her chicks?" How do you think this went over with those listening to him? What about with those in positions of power? Those trying to keep the religion pure? Women and little girls? How would Jesus' words be received in the halls of power today? How can we embody "neighborliness" in our public life? What are other images of self-giving, unconditional love? What would it mean to live as "signs of life" rather than "signs of death"? [Lesson Plans that Work](#), [Weekly Seeds](#)