As I was preparing to write a sermon for today, I came across a beautiful prayer by Tammerie Day, a spiritual director and chaplain in Washington state. Using the text of our gospel lesson for this day, she writes her prayer in the familiar style of the Lord's Prayer:

*“Our mothering hen who art brooding over us,*

*hallowed be thy sheltering wings.*

*Forgive our unwillingness to come into your embrace*

*and gather us in, reluctance and all.*

*Free us fom our fear of foxes*

*and the sharp bite of anything tht separates us from you.*

*Open our eyes to the plenty around us.*

*Open our hearts that our plenty be shared.*

*Lead us not into contention but into the dance of connection.*

*For thine is the grace that wakes us each new day,*

*and thine is the mercy that puts our souls at ease*

*and thine is the love that sets our hearts alight.*

*For ever and ever. Amen.”*

I thought it might be fun to take Day's prayer section by section.

**“Our mothering hen who art brooding over us,**

**hallowed be thy sheltering wings.”**

Is Jesus really comparing himself to a chicken here? There is something kind of embarrasing about this, for Jesus *and* for his followers. Surely Jesus could have drawn from other biblical images to describe himself. What about an eagle? Eagles are majestic and strong. The Hebrew Bible is full of inspiring images of the power of eagles and of their fierce protection over their young, such as the one in Deuteronomy, where we read of God's care for Jacob and his family: *“He sustained him in a desert land, in a howling wilderness waste; he shielded him, cared for him, guarded him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young, as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears tham aloft on its pinions.”* An eagle, a hawk, even a dove. All would have been fitting bird images suitable for a powerful Messiah. And yet we have this, *“Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often I have desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.”*

I know a former researcher at the veterinary school at Virginia Tech. Even after retirement, he continued his research into shrinking and curing tumors in dogs, using very precise amounts of Vitamin C. Before he moved to dogs, he began his experiments with chickens. It was easy to create tumors in these birds, he told me, because chickens are highly social animals. When one is separated from its flock, that bird becomes agitated and highly stressed; the stress can cause a chicken to sicken and develop tumors, which a researcher can then study and treat.

In addition to thriving when they are together in a flock, chickens are also fiercely protective of their young. Mother hens gather their chicks under their wings to protect them from chicken hawks and other predators that exist to kill their young.

So maybe the image works after all: Jesus as a hen who yearns to be in relationship with her chicks, who comes into the world to be part of and leader of the flock, who lives to protect her children from the predators who wish to devour them. This mother hen is also willing to be vulnerable – vulnerable to the point of death - for the sake of her flock. Jesus, while sheltering her children under her wing, knowingly puts herself in the position to be sentenced to death by the predator fox Herod. Not only that, Jesus actually goes to Jerusalem so that Herod doesn't have to come and find him. This is a sign of Jesus; fierce and abiding love for so; he loves us so much that he allows God's plan to come to fruition through him. And then Jesus conquers death to return to us and gather us under her wing forever.

**“Forgive our unwillingness to come into your embrace**

**and gather us in, reluctance and all.”**

How often do you and I shake off the embrace of our Lord to go it on our own? “We'll let you know when we need you,” we tell him, ignoring the reality that we need him every second of every minute of every hour of every day. Around and around we stumble, separated from our mother's embrace, stressing ourselves and others until we grow sick from the separation, grasping at useless remedies for our ills. What do you think would happen if you and I would stop our aimless wandering and turn to the one who lives to embrace us, to love us, to shelter us in her protective arms?

**“Free us fom our fear of foxes**

**and the sharp bite of anything that separates us from you.”**

Predators are all around us, seducing us with voices that tell us to grab whatever we can get, to build a wall around us with all our stuff, so we don't have to see those who have little or nothing, those who annoy us with their neediness. Sometimes the foxes sneak up on us and snatch us without warning, licking their lips in anticipation of devouring the bodies we have plumped up with our desires and our acquisitions. Sometimes we are the foxes, sneaking up on the defenseless and feasting on their skinny, malnourished bodies.

**“Open our eyes to the plenty around us.**

**Open our hearts that our plenty be shared.”**

In Friday's Daily Devotion from ELCA World Hunger, Pastor Kwame Pitts wrote about the lack of community in our global society, saying:

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| “There is a lack of understanding or even listening to the risen Savior’s words about loving one another. When you love another human being, it means you see after their very self: their health and wellness, their wholeness. It’s sorrowful that Sunday after Sunday, people of faith enter into faith communities and churches, partake of what is freely offered at the table, and after departing, refuse to do the same for those who are wandering, rooted in the streets because that is home. There is no understanding that all of this belongs to the Creator, so why wouldn’t we share our food, which likewise is birthed in creation, with those who are hungry or forgotten? In faces that I pass, I see the withering face of Christ in those who are starving, and I reach into my soul so that I, too, can invite them to eat good food.” |
|  |

**“Lead us not into contention but into the dance of connection.”**

In this election year, we need look no further than our TV's, computers and newspapers to feel the forces that seek to separate us and pit us against one another. Shouting matches, stretching the truth until it has no resemblance to where it started, creating an atmosphere of mistrust – all these things conspire to pull us apart, to deny the truth that we all belong to the one Creator God, a brooding hen who desires to pull us close and love us fiercely, to close the chasms we have dug to separate us from one another. For we are created to dance with one another, to delight in the life created for us, to love one another, to rejoice in this life we share.

**“For thine is the grace that wakes us each new day,**

**and thine is the mercy that puts our souls at ease**

**and thine is the love that sets our hearts alight.”**

Grace, mercy and love – these are the amazing gifts that are bestowed on us new each day, not because we deserve them but because they flow freely from Jesus' broken and resurrected body. When we crawl, timid and afraid each day, from below Jesus' sheltering wing, we live in those great gifts that accompany us on our daily journey and await us at each day's end, as we return to the one who yearns for us to rest in her love-filled embrace.

Grace, mercy and love, brand new every day, abundantly flowing without end. For us and for us to share.

**“For ever and ever.**

**Amen.”**

*Lent2C*

*February 21, 2016*

*Floyd-Willis Lutheran Parish*

*Luke 13:31-36*