

Text:

Theme: Thy Will Be Done

Palm Sunday - March 25, 2018

How many years have we been here with Jesus on Palm Sunday? Today, we join, again, with the whole crowd as we proclaim, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord." Matthew gives us hosannas, John gives us palm branches, and Luke takes us back to the birth of the King. How often have we been here with King Jesus as he comes to Jerusalem to be crowned with thorns and to ascend the throne of the cross where he brings us into salvation and peace?

Many of us have been here so often that the details have become unimportant. But if you look carefully at the details Luke gives, you will notice something that seems out of place. With the crowd following and praising, Jesus comes near Jerusalem and what does He do? He stops and weeps. He weeps for good reason. He knows what is coming for this city and her people who have so often rejected God's will.

Sometime before Palm Sunday, along his journey to Jerusalem, Jesus points to his coming death and speaks this lament: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing!"

This lament, like Jesus' tears as he comes near Jerusalem, is about God's will and his people's unwillingness to live in his salvation and peace. To help us understand his grief and our unwillingness, Jesus takes us into the world of—chickens.

I remember having a few chickens on our farm while I was growing up. It didn't take much searching before we could find a hen surrounded by a brood of little yellow creatures. Some followed while others strayed this way and that. But there were always a few feathered balls of yellow who would stray too far away.

Mother hen would walk over to them and "gather" them back to herself. And when she knew they needed shelter or protection, she would raise her wings, to her own discomfort, and draw them all beneath herself where they were covered and safe. With great patience, she would repeat this process of teaching, nurturing, protecting and gathering her brood. Given some thought, it's amazing mother hen was willing to repeat that process again and again when the will of her chicks was so often opposed to her own.

And what an appropriate picture Jesus uses to speak of Jerusalem and his own people. How often Jesus had experienced them as a brood of unwilling chicks! He had ushered in the gracious reign of God, the activity of the King. He had healed the lame, fed the hungry, cast out demons, calmed storms and raised the dead. He brought peace to his people.

The very city whose name contains the word peace (salem), should have seen, heard and understood the things that have to do with peace, but they kept on questioning, doubting, and opposing the ministry of Jesus. As they did so, they

were directly opposing the will of their God who had sent Jesus to gather them, that he might be their peace.

It's always easier to see someone else's unwillingness to live in God's will, isn't it? After all, we're disciples and would never willingly reject and oppose God's will in our lives, now would we? Even though Jesus' lament in Luke's gospel is for a specific city and specific people, he also laments our unwillingness to be gathered, as a hen gathers her chicks, into his gracious will.

For some of you, Jesus sees how hard you're trying to manage yet another situation as if you had the power to control the universe. How often he has poured his grace upon you when you found yourself helpless to make your plan work! He wants nothing more than to gather you, to see you let go of the struggle, to live in his freedom, and to rest in his peace. His tears fall as he watches you turn your back and take the reins yet again.

We all have some place in our life where we are unwilling to be conformed to the will of Jesus. That unwillingness is wrapped into what Jesus is up to today as he approaches Jerusalem weeping and lamenting. How often he's been here, with us, with his people, and with the world. No wonder tears flow from our Savior's eyes as he looks upon Jerusalem and his people as they praise him. No wonder tears flow from our Savior's eyes as he looks upon you as you praise him today.

I think that's why little details in Scripture make such a difference. Jesus' weeping on Palm Sunday leads us back to his lament where he employs the image of a hen and her chicks to talk about our unwillingness. He has tried to gather us back to himself so often that it seems logical he should walk away and leave us.

Yet, the image Jesus uses is not only of the unwilling chicks, but an image that shows an even greater unwillingness: A hen never, ever stops pursuing her chicks that she loves! When a mother hen sees her chicks confused, wandering away, or in peril, there is nothing that could prevent her from spreading her wings and covering those helpless, vulnerable, and often unwilling little ones.

[Turning to the cross] Can you see it? He raises his wings higher than it seems possible, to his own discomfort and anguish. So high and lifted up are the arms of Jesus that it took nails to hold him outstretched. Jesus is so unwilling to let you perish that he submits to the Father's will. Standing in the shadow of those blood-stained arms on the cross, we see the full fury of divine punishment fall in a deathblow, not upon us, his helpless chicks, but upon Jesus who received every last ounce of the Father's judgment.

"How often" Jesus meets you here, in this place, to gather you and remind you that you are his, marked by his powerful name in Baptism. How often he hears your confession and gathers you under his wings of forgiveness. How often he gathers you to himself at this altar, at his supper where he brings you into his presence and sets a banquet table of life and forgiveness before you.

When you see a pathway of unwillingness that you've walked down too many times—whatever it may be—and you feel helpless to do anything about it, lean into what Jesus is doing today because you can't change it on your own. As you

lean into Jesus, you experience the tender wings of grace that are already covering you. You experience his unwillingness to leave you on your own.

And as you look around, safe and secure, you discover that you are not alone. You are joined under his wings by all of us. Perhaps we could say: no one is gathered alone and no one leans into Jesus alone.

You may be thinking to yourself, "But you don't know my life. You don't know what I face. You don't know my challenges, my ongoing heartaches. Within my world, it's so much more complicated than you could imagine." But even if, even if your life is much more complicated than others may be aware of, there's Someone who understands, Someone who invites you, who gathers you, who is looking for you, looking for you to join together with all the rest of us that have or still need to allow Him to gather us so that we can all lean on Him.

Under His wings, we discover that we are not alone. Under His wings, we lean into Jesus' love and peace and discover, again, that his wings are already covering us. They have been covering us all along. And under his wings we find we are not alone in the struggle.

Today, on Palm Sunday, as we sing and celebrate the coming of the King who ascended the throne of the cross, we confess our own unwillingness but, even more, we trust and believe with all our hearts that, no matter where we find ourselves or how far we have strayed, the same Jesus who entered Jerusalem, who took the cross, rose three days later, and, at this very moment and every moment to come, He is and will continue to pursue us - like the hen who gathers her chicks under her wings. Amen.