



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year C – Second Sunday of Lent – March 17, 2019: The hen at Seabury Hall

When I was at Seabury Hall and I lived on campus in Upcountry Maui, there were wild chickens all over the schoolgrounds. And one day a teacher's dog chased after a mother hen and her brood and separated out one little chick who couldn't find its way back to its mother.

The Development Director frantically brought the one chick into my office and begged me to keep it at home for the night and then go out the next morning and look for its mother. With much chagrin, I agreed, putting the chick in a covered box, expecting to find a little chick cadaver in the morning.

Instead I uncovered the box at 6AM and found the little one looking up at me and saying, "I'm ready to go outside now."

So, all bleary-eyed and with no coffee yet, I walked all 13 acres of that campus looking for a hen and her brood and I finally found her by the performing arts auditorium. So, I let the chick out of the box, expecting it to be rejected by the hen. But the most wonderful thing happened. The chick ran to its mother and went right under her wing. And the hen accepted it. It brought to mind, of course, the words in this morning's Gospel:

How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings?

Whenever I pray with my spiritual director, she likes to take me through these guided meditations where she says, "Take your burdens and lean into Jesus."

I have a hard time with that. It reminds me of those trust exercises we used to do in high school and college where you'd have to fall back with someone behind you and you're supposed to trust `em enough to let `em catch you. As a little kid I remember watching a show called "Rhoda" which was a spin off of the "Mary Tyler Moore Show" and the characters were trying this out and Rhoda did it and her sister Brenda didn't catch her. The audience laughed, but I was horrified as a 9-year-old. After watching that, I knew I could never do that exercise. But the hen thing, the mother image, and leaning into that—that I can identify with.

I can remember a time where I've felt the presence of Jesus and where I was like the little chick being enfolded under Jesus' wing.

I'll never forget when I was in the third grade and I was having a side conversation with a classmate while the teacher was talking. Her name was Mrs. Leddy. Big woman. Red hair. Formidable. And she looked at me and said, "Tell the class what you were telling Kurt if it was so important that you had to tell him while I was talking."

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And I looked at her and said, bearing in mind now that this was in the days of corporal punishment, I stared her down and said, “It’s none of your business.” And she stared back. Death was sure. It would be swift. It would be quick.

But for some reason, Mrs. Leddy let me get away with it. But then she called my grandmother and we had to go back in later that day. And when we did, all she did when I walked into the room was kneel down to the ground, hold out her arms, enfold me in them and say, “Moki, we all make mistakes.”

Years later at a funeral in a Roman Catholic Church as they bore the body out of the parish I heard the choir sing this beautiful refrain to the deceased:

*May the choirs of angels come to greet you.
May they speed you along.*

And then this line:

May the Lord enfold you in His mercy.

I heard that line and I thought of Mrs. Leddy and the line from the gospel came to life for me:

How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings?

So, it seems pretty easy. We’re the brood, the little chicks. Jesus is the hen. We gather under Jesus’ wings. We’re safe. We’re loved. We’re at peace.

But several years ago, in Hilo I got a different take on the whole thing.

One Sunday I got a call from a parishioner asking me to go and see Auntie Winnie, a Holy Apostles matriarch, at Hospice, because she was asleep and the doctor felt she might not wake up again. So, I said I’d be there as soon as I could to anoint her and give her the Ministration of the Sick, last rites if you will.

I showed up. Several family members and parishioners were already there. Then more nieces came. There were like 15 of us in the room and it was time to do the rite – only I forgot the anointing oil at church.

So, Auntie Cynthia Sorenson, another Holy Apostles matriarch (and Hospice board member) went out into the yard and got four kukui nuts from a tree she knew was in the garden. After she picked them, she turned them upside down and brought them into the room. They were seeping oil where they had been separated from their stems on the tree. So, I blessed the nuts, said the prayers, put some on Auntie Winnie’s forehead and then asked everyone to do the same.

And then Auntie Winnie woke up, she woke up as if she was part of the brood under the wings of Jesus. And it begs the question, “If Auntie Winnie was the brood, one of the chicks, who were the rest of us?”

When we do baptisms, we promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons. I think we must also remember that “all persons” includes us. Christ dwell in us. And from time to time we have to be the hen that gathers her brood under her wings. We did that very well in that hospice room that day.

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That’s what the Church is called to do. We’re disciples, after all. We’re Christians. We’re people of God. We love one another as Christ, the mother hen, loves us. And we bring the words of scripture to life.

How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wing?

That’s our mission. That’s our charge. That’s our call. Let’s work with one another to live into that call and may God be glorified as we strive toward that end.

How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wing?

Amen.