### “I Have Desired” Steve Finlan for The First Church, Mar. 13, 2022

**Philippians 3:17–4:1**

17Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. 18For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. 19Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. 20But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. 21He will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. 4:1Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

**Luke 13:31–35**

31At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” 32He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. 33Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed away from Jerusalem.’ 34Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 35See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

What are the ingredients of our living? There are quite a few. There are physical necessities, food, shelter, employment. There are relationships, family and marital ties. There are friendships. There are principles, purposes, and beliefs. And there is a whole range of emotions that we experience in connection with all these aspects of life.

Our gospel passage today has a lot of emotion in it. It has sarcasm, sorrow, love, and resignation. The sarcasm is right at the beginning, when Jesus calls Herod a fox, which means someone tricky and clever. This is not a compliment. Jesus makes an oblique reference to his resurrection when he says “on the third day I finish my work” (Luke 13:32), not something the disciples would have understood at the moment, but probably remembered later. Then he comments, with sadness, that no prophet can be killed except in Jerusalem. What a terrible legacy, that prophets like Amos and Isaiah had been killed, and other prophets, like Jeremiah, had been abused and nearly killed.

Jesus’ sorrow increases when he grieves, not for himself, but for Jerusalem, that she keeps killing the prophets who are sent to her. And he expresses regret, because he would have gathered them under his wings, like a mother hen gathers its chicks. He would have protected and guided them. He uses a maternal image for his loving care for his people. He really wanted to do this for them. “How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings” he says (13:34). He would have guided the whole nation into a new day where they would have become spiritual leaders for humanity if they had accepted him as *their* spiritual leader, but they did not recognize the time of their visitation (Luke 19:44), they spurned the opportunity. And so “your house is left to you” (13:35). I actually prefer some other translations that say “your house is left to you desolate” (NIV). The NRSV didn’t leave out a word, but “left desolate” is how some translations handle the verb *afietai*, and I think that captures the meaning that is intended. It shows the emptiness of the “leaving,” and it expresses the heartbreaking sorrow that Jesus feels for them, for what they’re missing.

His final remark is that they will not see him again until they say “blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord” (13:35), which is what the crowd is going to proclaim on Palm Sunday (Matt 21:9), although it could possibly refer to the Second Coming, instead. I’m open to either interpretation. Either way, it’s a sorrowful address to the city that is going to reject him, although it’s really the religious leadership that rejects him, and the majority of the population just goes along with the leaders.

But some of the ordinary people are actually unspiritual, “their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame,” as Paul says (Phil 3:19). But of those who set their minds on *heavenly* things, Paul goes on, “our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (3:20). And the astounding promise, regarding our afterlife, is that “He will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory” (3:21). We will get transformed and spiritual bodies, like Christ’s resurrection body. What great promises we have, not only for the future but also for the present. We can open our hearts and receive more of God whenever we are really desirous. Imagine just telling God whenever you want more of his love and truth. It’s great news that we can do this, at any time.

Now, what about those bodies? In the ancient Mediterranean there was a hierarchy of bodies. Aristocratic bodies were more valued than working class bodies, which were more valued than slave bodies. This class division was eliminated by the resurrection of the dead, where everyone gets a glorified body, like Christ’s resurrection body. Revelation tells us every tear will be dried, and there will be no more death or mourning (Rev 21:4); this reality is not segregated by class or ethnicity or gender. Death is the great leveler, in that way. But each individual will resume at whatever level of spiritual progress she has made, and will begin there where she leaves off down here. Your individual progress is important, and it will be resumed when you are raised from the dead.

We go from Jesus’ heartfelt grieving for those who do not believe, to Paul’s transformational promises for those who *do* believe. I wanted to draw attention to Jesus’ loving nature and his will for good. He desired to guide and defend his brood. “I have desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings” (13:34). Maybe we can be part of his brood now, protected under his wings, if we have come to know him. Jesus as mother hen is one of the important images of God. It has us living within the environment Jesus provides, just as children live within the environment that the mother provides. Home is where mom is. In this image, the mother is also the leader. Jesus can fill this maternal role. He can simultaneously be the Son of God, and be like a mother to us. “Son” tells us how he is the image and revelation of God. “Mother” tells us how he holds and protects the family of believers.

We really have three images of Jesus in our readings today: Jesus as Son, as mother hen, and as Savior, in Paul’s letter. Meditate on all three images. They all present something useful for salvation and growth.