

Second Sunday in Lent

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Chances are that at some point in your life you will feel overwhelmed. For some it might result from a health condition or financial difficulties. For others the death of a loved one or a life transitions, like buying a house or having a baby or getting married. Some will hit that overwhelmed point with relationship problems, a demanding career, sleep deprivation, or a trauma like rape or abuse. It's possible that one of these things alone might be manageable – like a demanding career – until you're raising a child, the bank account is dwindling, and you get a dreaded diagnosis on top of that demanding career. Then, you feel irritable, depressed, anxious, and panicked. That ability to think clearly about thoughts and reality becomes clouded. It's exhausting, and it's the feeling of being overwhelmed.¹

In today's readings we find a variety of situations where people feel overwhelmed too. In Genesis there is Abram an old, childless man who is trapped in doubt and uncertainty about the future. The Psalmist is fearful of war, evildoers, and adversaries. And in the gospel the Pharisees are worried that Herod will catch Jesus and kill him.

Yet, in the mist of this overwhelming fear Jesus doesn't get bogged down and dragged into the worry of the Pharisees. In fact, Jesus sends them back to talk to Herod, to tell them that he's fulfilling his mission - he's doing what he's suppose to be doing. After all, in Luke Jesus was already run out of his hometown as he began his ministry (Luke 4). Jesus has already healed the sick, raised the dead, calmed a storm, and preached difficult words to hear. Jesus is a political, religious, and social rebel. Jesus knows that he's going to be caught, and Jesus knows that he will be killed in Jerusalem, yet Jesus does not allow this to sidetrack him from his mission. Jesus is focused. As one scholar puts it, "Jesus will keep to the road appointed, traveling the arduous path to Jerusalem to meet his death there like so many earlier prophets of God... Jesus continues on to Jerusalem not to prove himself fearless or a hero, not to make a sacrifice for sin to a judgmental God, not even to combat death and the devil. Rather, Jesus marches to Jerusalem and embraces the cross that awaits him there out of profound love for the people around him, a mother's fierce love [like a hen] that will stop at nothing to protect her children."²

That is a powerful response to the things that try to overwhelm us. For our God has a mission to love, serve, embrace, liberate, and reconcile all people. Yet, God does not only use words to communicate this; no, our God uses actions. Our God comes among us, struggles, like us, with the situations, people, and experiences that build our anxiety and fear leaving us feeling overwhelmed. Our God does not stand next to us passively; rather our God journeys with us. Our God gathers us together, like a mother hen.

This image of a mother hen in today's reading fascinates me. First, Jesus employs a feminine image for himself, *and* when we confess that Jesus reveals the essential character of God who sent him, this feminine image, then, is also applied to God.³ This image is important. For we know that in 2014 female full-time workers made only 79 cents for every dollar earned by men, a gender wage gap of 21%.⁴ Sure, it's a generality and there are exceptions to just about everything in life, but nevertheless a large part of our workforce is not being equally paid for the same job as their male counterparts. *And* in the context of the Bible where women only speak about 1.1% of the time,⁵ Jesus's claim on a female image is significant. Jesus could have chosen another image, but instead he chose a hen. So it's worth pausing and calling to mind this image that Jesus claims. And if you're here today and you struggle with the lack of feminine

¹ <http://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/issues/emotional-overwhelm>

² <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/02/lent-2-c-courage-and-vulnerability/>

³ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=2460>

⁴ <http://www.iwpr.org/initiatives/pay-equity-and-discrimination>

⁵ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=4530>

images for God, know that those images are there. God is also described as a protective mother eagle in Deuteronomy and a fierce mother bear in Hosea. Then in Isaiah God is described as a mother giving birth and as a breast-feeding her child. If you're overwhelmed by the masculinity and patriarchy of our faith and world, hear the good news that Jesus wants to gather you like a mother hen.

In fact, God gathers us all like a mother hen. We are gathered around this table each week. For the "meal" or communion portion of the liturgy the presiding minister often puts on the chasuble, which I am wearing the whole service today. This colored vestment matches the paraments and the color of the season, which are key indicators of our liturgical tradition. As I put out my arms in prayer, the chasuble begins to look like wings – perhaps like a mother hen. These wings remind us that God gathers all people to this holy table and this sacred space. With outstretched arms we remember Jesus's arms outstretched for all people constantly welcoming and embracing. Every week, we're both reminded of this welcome and encountered by this feminine image when the minister wears a chasuble.

The good news in today's gospel doesn't stop there either. It is not only that Jesus desires to bring us all together to this place and to this table of welcome. Jesus also sets the example of someone who remains true to his calling. We see that in the midst of the fear of death, Jesus continues to heal. With the fear of persecution, he continues to preach. Knowing that he will be welcomed into Jerusalem by the Pharisees and the crowds laying branches on the street and exclaiming, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord" - in the midst of all of that we remember on Palm Sunday, Jesus continues his journey. For Jesus is rooted in a deep sense of identity, mission, and selfhood. Jesus knows that though the anxiety, fear, uncertainty, and persecution swell; he remembers his baptism - that he is God's son, the beloved. And even when Jesus is crucified in Luke, this becomes the fulfillment of his full identity and self. Jesus's purpose and selfhood become fully revealed in his journey to Jerusalem, in his journey to the cross.

So too our identity is fully revealed in our baptisms. We are reminded in baptism that we are God's beloved children. We are also given our mission and identity. Each time we have a baptism the baptizing minister reminds us of that God-given identity. Does anyone know where we can find that reminder written out in the hymnal? Yes, page 228 in the front. Let's all grab a hymnal and walk through this calling we have as God's people. Here we see in baptism that we are to live among God's faith people, to hear the word of God, to eat the holy supper, to learn the Lord's prayer, the 10 commandments, the creeds, to often put the holy scriptures in our hands, and to pray. We're reminded to do these things as a part of our identity because it helps us to proclaim Christ through word and deed. We proclaim Christ through word and deed by trusting as Christ trusted, by praying as Jesus prayed, by working to reconcile the world, by caring for others and the world, and by working for justice and peace.

In your baptism you were given *this* identity -the identity, the mission, the vision, the guiding principles, the vocation, or however you want to acknowledge it – you were called to be active reflections of God's love and grace. And if you don't do these things it's not that you're going to hell, or that you're a bad person, or God doesn't love you; rather we do these things as a way to acknowledge that Jesus's example and life changes us and shapes us. We do these things as a loving response because, gee wilikers, we've been given so much from our God!

This week during our Lenten Exploration you're invited to do some personal exploration. To more fully embrace your identity you're challenged to identify something that gets in the way of living out this baptismal vocation. Maybe that glowing screen before bed isn't allowing you a good night sleep, so you're not waking up refreshed to love others? Maybe refined sugar is bringing down your energy? On the other hand, maybe you're feeling a bit content and so a lunch fast or a fast while the sun is up could help remind you of the gifts God has given? Whatever it might be, identify something to explore giving up this week and use that change to be mindful of you baptismal identity. On your way out today you'll find a short reflection sheet at the door. I hope that it will ground you in our liturgy, our baptismal identity, and hopefully allow you to explore your faith in a new way. Since our baptismal identity isn't something we share alone, you're invited to share your thoughts and reflections with me and others using the link on

the bottom of the sheet. I'm excited to hear your reflections and to use them as a way to explore our collective baptismal vocation together.

Friends, when you're overwhelmed, you're not alone. You all *are* gathered together, like a hen, by our God – gathered into *this* place and with *these* other faithful people. God loves *you*. You have been given your identity, and you have been given an example of this identity through the ministry of Jesus Christ. And finally, you're not alone in this overwhelming world. Come to this place with God's people to taste and see the goodness of our God's presence. Amen.