

Of Raspberries and Hens and the Stars
St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Church Novato
Lent 2C 2010
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There are in this mornings readings
Two lovely images of God and
I want to point them out
So that when you go out into the world today
Your remembrance of this morning's readings
Is not of a blood and guts from that first reading and the
Foreboding and warnings and dark images from Luke

I want you to remember how God
After Abram doubts his promises
Takes Abram outside
Perhaps with an arm around Abram's shoulders and
Waving toward the twinkling stars
Asks Abram to count the stars if he can
Tell me how many there are
That's how many descendents you'll have

Now Abram wants to believe God
Wants to believe that
After all he's been through
That he and his wife Sarai will have children
That this land they are in will be theirs and
That God will be with them
They will be protected
Just as God has promised all along but
Like most of us Abram wants it in writing
He wants a sign a guarantee so
That's when it gets unpleasant
God sends him this strange dream that
Because of all the images of sacrificed animals
Abram would have understood perfectly well *breathe*
We need it explained and
According to Bible scholars
Very broadly interpreted
This dream symbolizes the agreement between God and Abram

A deal is 'cut' when God
Who is represented by the fire
Cuts between the pieces of the sacrifice
The bloods and guts which
Capture our imagination are really just extraneous information

Now Hebrew Testament readings like this
Don't speak easily to us in this century
We tend to find them obscure or irrelevant
And we're a little skeptical about the details sometimes
About the blood and guts and fire etc
But underneath all those disgusting details
The truth in the story remains
And it is a sweet truth indeed

Our creator is a God who is protective
Who wants to interact with us
Who cares what happens
Who keeps promises
Who stays with us
No matter how skeptical we may be

Then in the Gospel reading
We have Jesus saying that
He wants to gather us all under his wing and keep us safe
Just like a mother hen
Now this is a remarkable image of Jesus of God
It is remarkably feminine image and
It echoes that image we've just heard in Genesis of
A wondrously protective God
Of a God who keeps trying to gather us in
To protect us with
Motherly care and love and concern

Jesus says this in response to the Pharisees
Who have rushed up to tell Jesus that
King Herod wants him dead and
Jesus instead of being frightened or
Questioning why
Simply responds by saying he's
Too busy to meet with him

He has people to heal and
Things that must be said
He's working to gather as
Much of his brood together as he can and
Frantically trying to teach them
How to gather others and
Keep them safe from foxes
 A wily untrustworthy thievish animal if
 Ever there was one
 And always after the hens and her chicks
Foxes like Herod
Because Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem

Jerusalem Jerusalem
Jesus laments 'How I've longed to
Gather you up and
Keep you safe
Just like a hen gathers her brood under her wings'

And then the line that goes straight to our hearts
'But you were not willing'

There is something very poignant in all this
In the first story there is a man wondering if God will
Keep his promises
And in the next story
We have God lamenting that
The people have never really trusted those promises

Of course we are the chicks
Who just won't stay under the
Wings of the hen
We are Abram who
 After standing outside in the yard and
 Looking at the stars with God and
 Having him promise he'll give us
 Exactly what we've always wanted
Still want more proof
We are Jerusalem Jerusalem

Perhaps it is because we want the safety of

A God that never lets anything awful happen
We want the safety of God's wings all the time
But that kind of safety would mean we were mere puppets
Actors in some cosmic play

The kind of safety God offers means
God is with us
Through all our suffering and
Even through death into life
Just as God was with His son
Through his suffering and death in Jerusalem
This is the promise we have that
We still can't quite believe

Tonight we can go out and
Look at the stars
Just like Abram did
We'll see a full moon and lots of stars
Notice the Milky Way
Astronomers in a lab in Germany have
Somehow discovered that there is
Ethyl formate out there in the Milky Way and
That means that if we went there to visit
When we took a deep breath of air
We would smell rum and taste raspberries
God has made the center of the Milky Way
One big Raspberry Daiquiri

That the center of the Milky Way
Smells of rum and tastes of raspberries
That back there somewhere all billion or so
Of us people have a common ancestor
Like Abram and Sarai or
That we can even figure that out
Is miraculous and astonishing
It's hard to believe

This is a
Wildly interesting creative hard – to-believe in God but
A God who shelters us as best she can
Laments over us and

Wants to give us our heart's desire
Who will stand with us always and
At the end
Will most certainly be there to
Gather us together and shield us under her wing

OLD TESTAMENT: Genesis 15: 1 - 12, 17 - 18 (all)

(NRSV) After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." 2 But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Elie'zer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." 4 But the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." 5 He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness. 7 Then he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chalde'ans, to give you this land to possess." 8 But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" 9 He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." 10 He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. 11 And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. 12 As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.

17 When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. 18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,

PSALM 27 (RCL)

(NRSV) The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?
2 When evildoers assail me
to devour my flesh--
my adversaries and foes--
they shall stumble and fall.
3 Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.
4 One thing I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD,
and to inquire in his temple.
5 For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.
6 Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.
7 Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!

8 "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!"
Your face, LORD, do I seek.
9 Do not hide your face from me.
Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.
Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!
10 If my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will take me up.
11 Teach me your way, O LORD,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.
12 Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they are breathing out violence.
13 I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.
14 Wait for the LORD;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the LORD!

NEW TESTAMENT: Philippians 3: 17 - 4: 1 (all)

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

GOSPEL: Luke 13: 31 - 35 (RCL)

(NRSV) At that very hour some Phar'isees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Her'od **wants to kill you.**" 32 He 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. 33 Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' 34 Jerusalem, 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! 35 See, 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."