

WGUMC February 24, 2013 Luke 13:31-35 "Under a Wing"

I should really write a sermon on this passage some day. I'd probably go with the fox in the hen house theme. King Herod, that old fox, is sneaking up on Jesus, who is playing mother hen to his brood of followers. I'd preach about how the Pharisees sound like a lot of politicians these days, always trying to scare the truth away. You see, they don't want Jesus to go to Jerusalem. They don't want the people to hear what he has to say. So they try to spook him by telling him that Herod is out to get him. Politicians always need a bogeyman to get people to pay attention to them. But the bogeyman doesn't work on Jesus. He has no fear of him. There is no fear in love. God is love.

To understand what was going on, what was coming down for Jesus as he made his way to Jerusalem, you have to look at the political, but what struck me about our Gospel reading this week was much more personal than political. What caught my

imagination as I read this passage was the catch I thought I heard in Jesus' throat, the tear I might have seen on Jesus' cheek, when he talked about all the prophets who had been killed by people too afraid to live. In their fear, they pushed God away. And after having done that, it was easy to put Jesus away.

And I thought about how we've all done some of that, pushed God away. Do we have any idea how much it grieves God when we take the wings of the morning and fly away or when we say to God: go away? Yet God keeps coming around, keeps trying to gather us under wing, so that we won't let our fears control everything.

I could have written that sermon for you this morning, but I didn't. I The Spirit must have wanted me to write a poem instead, because that's what got written. It's a poem about how I once ran away and how God found me anyway. Now seminary may seem like a strange place to run from God, but at

the time it felt as if the Spirit were driving me into a wilderness called seminary. In those years I was preparing for ministry, I'd never been so hungry. My faith had never been so tested. Let me tell you about that time. I hope you'll pardon the rhyme.

Duke Divinity 1986

A Damn Yankee in Durham,
a feminist arrives at Duke Divinity,
But I wasn't prepared for my soul to be
this screwed up by seminary.
You see, I didn't fit in,
and couldn't get out,
had no idea what to make of the South.
The Methodist Church was so different there,
sometimes I felt like I had green hair.
Chapel every Thursday was too much for me,
with all the politics of the university,
professors who acted like they were god
as they swaggered and strutted across the Quad.
So most Thursdays, I would run away
to the Sarah P. Duke Memorial Gardens,
(the native plants section)
and that's where I would pray.
I ran from religion and the mess we had made of it
and perhaps from my own future, in hopes of evading it.
I ran from the god that stalked those halls,
vested in privilege and soaked in applause.
I ran away looking for a god who was real,
all the while, wanting a faith I could feel.
Little did I know that God was looking for me.

Truth is, I was determined not to be found
anywhere near Duke Divinity.
Well, it took four years in the ministry,
where I was patiently taken under wing
by wise Christians who knew something
about life and love and forgiveness and grace
and created for me some time and space
until my heart was open enough to believe
what I'd been too lonely and self-centered to see:
that God always comes in the mess of community.
That means there must be at least two or three,
and we're not perfect and it's not pretty,
and things do get political
and, yes, people can be phony
and far too often it will be about money.
Just like the world Jesus came to save.
So you in the church, be strong, be brave,
because Christ comes here and Christ comes now.
These days, I still run, but I'm learning how
to run with you, and to run with grace,
to fight this fight and keep this faith.
So, under God's wing, let's gather together
Let's make a mess of loving God and our neighbor!

I want this church to be a place where folks can be real,
where we can make and clean up messes and have the chance
to heal. That's why I've invited all of you to share from your
heart. And Laura is brave enough to make a start.