

### Safety Under His Wings!

Tell me as you hear him groaning,  
Was there ever grief like his?  
Friends through fear his cause disowning,  
Foes insulting his distress,  
Many hands were raised to wound him,  
None would intervene to save,  
But the deepest stroke that pierced him  
Was the stroke that Justice gave.

It's pretty clear we're in Lent, isn't it? All year long, every week you hear that Jesus died for your sins. Every week all year long, you hear about the suffering and death. Every week you come face to face with your sins that caused it – but there's something about Lent. The alleluias are gone, the music is serious, the poetry, the Passion, the very present reality of His work jumps out at us. Hymns like the one we just sang are hard to get past. "The deepest stroke that pierced him was the stroke that Justice gave."

And this Sunday in Lent, the aspect of his being stricken, smitten, and afflicted that jumps out at us is this – He did it when we didn't want it. He forced the issue. He willingly, aggressively accomplished our salvation, even when the ones he was fighting for were fighting against him. And he uses the picture of a hen and her chicks to describe it.

In the Old Testament lesson we saw Jeremiah faithfully speaking the truth when the people he was there for wanted to kill him for it. Paul wrote about all those who live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Jesus confronted Herod who wanted to kill him and the Pharisees who wanted to trap him into coming to Jerusalem where they could kill him. Jesus saw through it all and said he would keep working and he would reach his goal. No matter what was thrown against him – **he would give safety under his wings.**

I've seen countless variations of the story – a farmer or a firefighter or a small boy comes upon the charred remains of an eagle or a hen with wings spread and fried, only to realize that under those wings, the chicks were still alive, insulated from the fire by their mother's sacrifice. I haven't ever seen that with my own eyes, but I'm sure you've seen it where the mother bird will threaten to fight even something as powerful as a human because she fears for the safety of her chicks. That's a powerful picture Jesus brings into our text – the protective nature of that mother bird, willing to sacrifice for her loving, adorable, dependent children.

But here's where it gets crazy. The children Jesus is talking about weren't so loving, or adorable, or dependent. They didn't even want the protection he was dying to give. Look at what he says: <sup>34</sup> **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!** Jesus wanted to protect them, but they weren't willing. So the Pharisees tried to trap him. So Herod, who wanted to be known as the champion of the Jews, wanted to kill him like he had killed his forerunner John the Baptist. And it wasn't the first time. God had sent prophets like Jeremiah – and they killed them too. And now they were trying to get rid of Jesus. They didn't want his help. They didn't want his wings. How unappreciative! How unthinkable! How unbelievable!

Well, it's only unbelievable until it strikes us that we do the same thing. And, of course, we bristle to hear that if we're paying attention - or maybe we write off this minute of the sermon, "OK – here's where pastor says how bad we were, but he'll tell us it's all OK in a few minutes." Remember the suffering we're focusing on in Lent? "If you think of sin but lightly, nor suppose the evil great, here you see its nature rightly, Here its guilt may estimate. Mark the sacrifice appointed. See him bear the awful load." This isn't "no big deal". The hen had to spread out to take the intensity of pain of being charred to death to protect those chicks. Jesus died on the cross – that is not some sterile slogan. That is agony; that is literally offering his flesh to be torn apart, his lungs to be collapsed, his body to be broken – because you sinned, because you acted like those Pharisees, like Jerusalem – you opposed the message. Maybe you didn't threaten your pastor's life – but your mind has

distracted you to think of every other thing in the world than this message as you're hearing it. Your heart has motivated you to put more energy into so many other things than hearing and studying and sharing this message. Your greed has convinced you that this church needs you more than you need it. How often has he longed to gather us together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

We were not willing. That's what is so striking about the readings for today. Yes, the sacrifice Jesus made is amazing in itself, but today we see that he made it for those who were not willing. To do that – he had to persevere. That's what he told those Pharisees. Let me read that verse again: **"Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.'"** <sup>33</sup>**In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day-- for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!**

He knew what was going to happen in Jerusalem, and he persevered. He knew what it would take to offer that safety under his wings – and he did it anyway. He didn't fear Herod's wrath. He didn't fear the Pharisees plots. He came for a reason and he accomplished it.

I'm sure, if you've turned on the Olympics at all – you've heard the stories. It seems that there are just as many human interest stories as actual events televised. Now, on the basis of their accomplishments, there would be very little reason you'd recognize the names J.R. Selski, Lindsey Jacobellis, Shani Davis, Lindsey Vonn, or any of the others. But when we hear what they've been through - We respect the girl who works for four years to make up for the mistake she made last time. We're inspired when someone can fight through the pain of injury that would put others out of the competition and do all she can to represent her country with a gold. We admire the kid who overcame prejudice and difference and worked so hard to become the best. We feel proud to be an American when the teenager who had 60 stitches in his leg the last time he skated at the US Trials manned up and got on the medal podium. Overcoming those obstacles is impressive. Undergoing pain to achieve a goal is praiseworthy.

So be prepared to be inspired. Get ready to dish out some praise. Verse 33: **"In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day – for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem...I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"**

That is commitment. That is dedication. And he went through it to do more than represent his country; he did it to rescue us. He went through what he did to represent God – to show us God's love, to protect us - his unwilling, undeserving, ugly chicks. He stretched out his wings and covered our sins, protecting us from the wrath of God by taking those welts on his back. He stretched out his wings by stretching out his arms and being nailed to that cross so that we could raise our arms in victory.

And here we are, safe under his wings, protected from all that Satan can throw at us – from those on the outside like Herod, and even those in the church like the Pharisees. Jesus faced them so that we have victory. You think the Olympians swell with joy to hear their national anthem played – may we do the same this season of Lent as we hear the songs of our victory through the story of the battle, the suffering and death of our Savior.

Like we just sang...

Here we have a firm foundation,  
Here the refuge of the lost;  
Christ's the rock of our salvation,  
His the name of which we boast,  
Lamb of God, for sinners wounded,  
Sacrifice to cancel guilt –  
None shall ever be confounded  
Who on him their hope have built.

We are safe under his wings. In Christ, Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through faith, in Christ Jesus. Let's sing that peace in our sermon hymn - #440 – On Eagles' Wings.