

**Reflection: Winning or Losing?
Luke 13:31-35**

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A couple of weeks ago I talked about the effects the Olympic games beginning seemed to be having on us locals and on Canadians in general. In the opening there seemed to be an allusion to a pride of identity and a turning of us toward what was possible. This beginning was energizing and cause for reflection.

Two weeks later we stand at the last day of the event and the value of Gold has skyrocketed. The euphoria unleashed has been unimaginable. As the days pass and the best historians and analysts of our country measure the impact I'm sure we'll hear more. One of the most interesting reflections/realities of our record-breaking number of gold medals is the suggestion that maybe as Canadians we do actually want to win. That we are not as content as we thought with being the younger brother to our southern neighbours or that we aren't just all about reservation, and getting along and being nice. There is that pride in actually winning, feeling proud—wanting to really be the best.

I find myself wondering, whether you have fully taken in the Olympics or hermitted yourself away from it, whether that pride of winning hasn't seeped in somewhere with just a little glee at what our athletes have accomplished. One has to wonder if our "owning of the [gold] podium" will change our international identity from the diverse, embracing, sometimes too apathetic to an arrogance and addiction to be at the top."...Doesn't everyone like to win?

In today's passage from the gospel of Luke we find ourselves as Christians defined within a particular image. Jesus is on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Here he is told by some Pharisees that he ought not to enter the political city or his destiny is sealed. Jerusalem has a history of destroying anyone or anything that threatens its power. The Pharisees, working for Herod, suggest that is what is in store for Jesus. But with great confidence Jesus rebuts this and indicates that he is not afraid, that he plans on continuing with his God-given mission of healing and teaching. He refers to Herod as a fox—cunning and manipulative and afraid of losing his power. Then Jesus laments:

"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!"

Now I have not been to Jerusalem, but I understand that outside of modern Jerusalem, on a hill opposite Jerusalem, there is a chapel. The chapel exists because this is the place it is said that Jesus wept for the city. Apparently behind the altar in the chapel the wall is made of glass and the view out the glass is the skyline of Jerusalem. On the front of the altar there is an image of a rooster. A bright, fierce looking bird made out of tile and surrounding the rooster was a flock of little chicks under his wings. This image is wrong if it was a testimony to the text we just heard. It wasn't a rooster and chicks; it was a *hen* and chicks. Why did the artist take the liberty of changing the hen to the rooster (Barbara Brown Taylor)? Maybe because of the strength of the rooster. A rooster is strong and fierce with spiked claws. A hen has no talons and no sharp beak.

However, in the passage Jesus does describe himself as a hen trying to protect her chicks, tending them and keeping them from harm, feeding and sheltering them from any dangers. We may be left wondering...how is that for the image of God...a hen, a chicken, vulnerable to the foxes of this world. Why didn't Jesus choose a more powerful image from the Israel tradition? What about the mighty eagle of Exodus, or Hosea's stealthy leopard? What about the proud lion of Judah, mowing down his enemies with a roar? Compared to any of those, a mother hen does not inspire much confidence. No wonder some of the chicks decided to go with the fox. (Barbara Brown Taylor)

I wonder if some of Jesus early followers wanted a more apparent winner. A revolutionary in Jesus who would take on the city with intention. Someone who would match rage with rage. Instead he enters the city, with vulnerability and tenderness even if it means certain death. I wonder if some of us who attempt to follow Jesus *now* wish every now and again for a more winning image. One that would be more convincing and determined. Why the complexity of a vulnerable hen. If the path of Lent, in our church cycle of living, is a path where we decide if we can walk the path Jesus demands of us—wouldn't we want to own the podium so to speak? Jesus seems like a hard sell.

In the novel, *Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver, popular a few years back, this point is all too real. The basic story is one whereby a Baptist minister from the states travels to the Congo in Africa with his family to serve as a missionary. In the tiny village where he finds himself, the job of course is to start a Christian church. On one particular instance the minister is working particularly hard to try

and get the villagers to subscribe to worshipping Jesus because they currently serve a variety of Gods. The church doesn't grow very quickly at first but has spurts. People would come and then not return after awhile. Finally one of the villagers explains to the ignorant westerners that this is due to the fact that the villagers are living under such harsh conditions. They are starving and sick, children are dying. So they try out this Jesus for a while and test to see whether the promises that the Baptist minister clings to come to fruition. Seeing no change in their life for the better they deduce that this Jesus is no better a God than the ones they already have.

That is where following Christ and Lent get confusing and more complicated. Perhaps the image of Jesus as the hen is misleading. What Jesus refers to when he speaks about Jerusalem is the determination and persistence he has to connect. To come from God to connect with the world, to gather us in and transform the earthly existence so that things can be permanently different. The problem is not in Jesus and his inability to fix but in the resistance to his ways by those who hold the power and prestige and resist under threat. We may want a more convincing winner but that path takes time.

Our hen gives us the image that the "winning" comes in the gathering and intention and caring and tending. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"

As we walk the path of Lent, can it be that we search for ways to understand the pathway of vulnerability where our leader leads us.

Maybe it is in the vulnerability of standing arm and arm in a human chain with people across our city, bearing gold scarves, not resisting the pride and accomplishment of the best athletes in the world but waiting and yearning for that same possibility and momentum to bring care and nurture to those without shelter in our streets—to the "chicks" in need of a sheltering wing.

Maybe it means reaching across lines of ignorance and politics to meeting others in our world who have suffered atrocities and seeing how stories and belief in the work of Mayan women can lessen the burden and bring healing and awareness. [Reference to guests from Guatemala at worship with us.]

Maybe it is creating communities of belonging for our young people to learn and care and strive for things that make a difference for them and our society. [Scouting community present]

Maybe it is in a willingness to listen to the prophets...no matter how uncomfortable or inconvenient it is.

Barbara Taylor says this: "If you have ever loved someone you could not protect, then you understand the depth of Jesus' lament. All you can do is open your arms. You cannot make anyone walk into them. Meanwhile, this is the most vulnerable posture in the world—wings spread, breast exposed—but if you mean what you say, then this is how you stand."

And we have an advantage over those who first sought to follow Jesus' path into Jerusalem. Because we know that it does not end in the stance of vulnerability. On Easter morning we remember that the foxes don't have the final say.

May we trust in our Lenten journey and the one who leads us.
Amen.