

Second Sunday of Lent 2016 morning

Luke 13: 31 – end

Has everybody seen the Bridlington Free Pres this week? This a letter to the editor encouraging people to re-home ex-battery hens. Well, if Lent is the season to resist temptation, Adriane and I have failed miserably. I've been on the internet and I've adopted four ex-battery hens that are coming at Easter. They're going to be added to the three Pekin Bampton's we already have. It's only £2.50 per bird, so I've got four hens for £10. Of course, we're also having to buy another new, top of the range hen coop and run, so if you factor it all in, they're probably going to produce the most expensive eggs in culinary history. But we're very excited about it all. In fact we've already named them. not that we've got literary pretensions but they're called Anne, Emily, Charlotte and Bramwell. I know Bramwell's a boy's name, but it's not my fault the Brontes only had three daughters and one son, is it? But don't worry: they are all female. We're not going

to disturb the neighbourhood with a cock crowing. All of which means that these hens are never going to be mother hens.

And that means that we're never going to see in action this wonderful simile that Jesus uses as he contemplates Jerusalem. In this morning's Gospel reading we've heard him say "Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings." There's something very homely and heart-warming about it, but there's something horrific to it as well – there always is with Jesus. There are stories of hens trapped in fires who shield their young by hiding them under their wings, and sacrifice themselves to the flames. This is just the way Jesus loves us.

Burt the more puzzling thing is working out how Jesus saying this fits in with where we've got in the story so far. Remember, we're dealing with St.Luke's Gospel; and don't confuse it with stuff from other Gospels –

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you can't conflate them to create one, unified chronology of Jesus' life. They don't work like that; and it's not what they're for. In St. Luke's gospel, at the point we've got to, Jesus is leaving Galilee, on his way to Jerusalem. He's not got there yet. And some Pharisees say to him "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." But we've got no idea why they said it. Are they on his side, or are they against him? Are they encouraging him to flee to safety? Are they trying to entrap him into abandoning his project and exposing him as a fraud? Are they trying to compel him to where there are even more destructive forces in Jerusalem? We don't know.

What we do know is that Jesus will not be deflected from his committed intention to go to Jerusalem even though he's convinced that puts him on a direct collision course with forces of destruction. In fact, he laments over Jerusalem as if it's already happened. He says "you *were not* willing to be gathered under my wings like an old mother hen" even though he's not got

there yet. So this little passage is confusing, if we're trying to work out the order it's set in, but it serves to be for us an anticipation of what is to come. There is an inevitability of Jesus walking into conflict with forces of destruction.

And as we read that, we're trying to keep a holy Lent. That means we're seeking to make ourselves open and receptive to God in order to be Christ-like. But if Jesus is someone who walks directly towards conflict, being Christ-like can't mean being all peace and light. Being Christ-like must involve voluntarily taking ourselves to dark places, staring conflict straight in the face and grappling with it.

Each week since Christmas, I think, we've had children's shoes on the steps in front of the altar here at the Priory. Each week we have offered the shoes in our worship, blessed them and dedicated them to God's service for the benefit of children coming ashore on the island of Lesbos seeking refuge from conflict in

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places like Syria. Each week they've been taken away and replenished by more donations of children's shoes to be offered, blessed and sent on.

It's been particularly important that these children's shoes have been offered in worship rather than just collected in a good cause. The offertory in our worship is not about collecting things, about collecting money or shoes or anything else. The offertory is about those who worship responding to the call God makes on our lives. That call is to offer our lives, unconditionally, in his service. Whatever we bring to the altar – money, the produce of the earth (that is, bread and wine,) shoes, whatever - is just a token by which we symbolise the offering of ourselves, our very selves, the essence of our being and our identity.

By offering these shoes to be sent to Lesbos to be distributed by the charitable organisation Starfish Foundation to some of the most vulnerable people in the earth – people who have lost families, homes,

livelihoods, the commercial, retail and civic infrastructure of where they lived; who have walked without knowing where they were going, without knowing where they would find food or shelter; who have been exploited by ruthless and cynical people smugglers; who have been loaded aboard overcrowded unseaworthy craft, had the engines started and then been cast off without a proper pilot to be adrift for hours at risk of drowning or dehydration or hypothermia – by offering those shoes we are offering a token of our commitment to complete a Lenten journey, to go to dark places, stare conflict in the face and to grapple with it. We are endeavouring to be Christ-like.

Now we complement that offering by having a Lent appeal for money for the carriage of those shoes to Lesbos.

As we make our offering it is so that what is offered can be transformed by God's grace. It is so that what

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is offered becomes more than the sum of their physical properties. They are transformed to provide spiritual sustenance, to be the stuff of salvation.

It was by being committed to face the conflict that inevitably lay ahead of Jesus in Jerusalem that Jesus passed through death to resurrection and thereby grants us our salvation. It is our prayer that, if we are prepared to face up and grapple with the destitution of those wretched people coming ashore on Lesbos, they will not just have fresh, functional shoes, but will know themselves to be gathered – as a hen gathers her brood under her wings – within the love of the one in whose name the shoes have been blessed and sent.

Amen.