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The Message: Cliché 3: You Are Your Past

It takes some of us a lifetime to figure out that we aren't who we are because of what happens to us.

Jesus knew who he was from the beginning.

Jesus arose early Monday morning. He had spent the night in Bethany, five miles from Jerusalem, in the home of his dear friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. From there he departed with his disciples down the road to Jerusalem.

As he descended from the Mount of Olives he paused. Before him -- a magnificent view of Jerusalem, in which the whole city lies in full view in the valley below -- white limestone which turns to gold in the morning sun. He stopped to view this breathtaking, panoramic scene.

As Jesus viewed the city, he began to weep. He cried out: "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!"

Whenever Jesus uses farm imagery, or, as it is sometimes called, pastoral imagery, some may be tempted to think, oh how sweet, -- a mother hen gathering chicks under her wings.

But if you have actually experienced anything of farm life, the romance -- well, for me, it flies out the window.

In a moment of insanity we bought an old farmhouse, and with it we inherited 7 hens and two roosters. You'll recall that the head rooster was beautiful, red, with shimmering navy blue wings. So beautiful was he, that a neighbour asked to breed his hens with our rooster. When the population of hens increased by many, the rooster flew the coop. Literally. We heard him crowing occasionally from the woods in the back forty. He lacked confidence in who he was -- head rooster.

So we were left with the second rooster -- and seven -- mostly post-menopausal hens. Then we had two chicks -- who were cared for by two hens -- not their mothers, who didn't seem to notice that they weren't their chicks -- totally different breeds from their surrogate mothers.

We pretty much needed sheep dogs to get those dumb chicks into the chicken house at the end of the day. They lived up to Chicken Little's reputation. Despite the daily repetition and the food we tempted them with, they simply wouldn't follow their mothers. We had to scare them into going under their mothers' wings.

So let's hear Jesus again:

As Jesus viewed the city, he began to weep. He cried out: "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!"

Why does Jesus lament?

Because the people of Jerusalem didn't know who they were. God had sent them prophets time and time again to tell them who God intended them to be, but they never listened. They allowed their identities to be formed by the events of the day – the invasions, the jostling of power by their leaders; they became what happened to them.

But Jesus knows who he is no matter what happens to him.

When the Pharisees warn Jesus that Herod is out to get him, he is absolutely adamant that he is going on with his work.

“Go and tell that fox that he isn't distracting me!” He remembers his purpose – responding to the hurts of people in the area – but then he remembers his larger purpose – to be on his way to Jerusalem, “Because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.”

But even as he is about God's intention for him, Jesus pauses to weep over Jerusalem.

“How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings...”

There is a church on the Mount of Olives now, just about where Jesus stood and wept. In the church is not a picture of Jesus weeping, but rather *a mosaic of a hen with wings outspread, gathering her chicks into her breast.*

Jesus isn't what happened to him. If he were, the mosaic would have left him weeping. Jesus remembered his purpose, challenged his accuser and went on.

But we – we are so often convinced that what has happened to us defines us, that we run around like dumb chicks.

As a mother hen spreads her wings over her brood, so God would spread protective wings over God's people. But we have counted the love and protection of God as nothing, choosing instead to go our own way

And the mother hen weeps. How could such a thing be? How could the children of Israel have been so foolish, so unnaturally rebellious as to turn away from the warm wings offered to them? Especially when those wings had brought them safe through so many difficulties. Especially when God had delivered them time and again from their enemies, and bestowed on them so much that was the envy of the people around them.

It's still happening -- people not knowing who they are in God's love. People doing horrible, terrible things.

How could WE do such a thing? - How can WE be so foolish or behave so unnaturally as to stray from the sheltering love of God?

In those words of Jesus we hear the voice of God's lamenting when we do not live the lives intended for us by God. We hear the sound of God's heart breaking when lives are taken. We know God weeps when we do not live up to the basic teaching to love the stranger. With the tender fierce love of a mother God loves his children. And God has a different intention for us.

You Aren't What Has Happened to You: You Are ...
You are who God intends you to be.

*Hymn 375: "Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness"

Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness, blow through the wilderness,
calling and free, spirit, spirit of restlessness, stir me from placidness,
Wind, wind on the sea.

You moved on the waters, you called to the deep,
then you coaxed up the mountains from the valleys of sleep.
and over the eons you called to each thing,
wake from your slumbers and rise on your wings.

You swept through the desert; you stung with the sand,
and you goaded your people with the law and a land
and when they were blinded with their idols and lies
then you spoke through your prophets to open their eyes.

You sang in a stable, you cried from a hill
then you whispered in silence, when the whole world was still
and down in the city; you called once again,
when you blew through your people on the rush of the wind.

You call from tomorrow, you break ancient schemes,
from the bondage of sorrow the captives dream dreams,
our women see visions, our men clear their eyes,
with bold new decisions your people arise.