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Luke 13:31-35
 Gen. 15:1-12,17-18
 Psalm 27
 Philippians 3:17-4:1

March 13, 2022
 The Second Sunday in Lent



“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...”

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I long to gather you under my wings, how I long to take care of you.

These words from our Gospel are almost painful...hearing Jesus long to care for those who want to harm him. His heart breaks. But...as much pain as I hear in these words, I also hear hope...hope that Jesus isn't turning his back on Jerusalem. No matter the pain, he never ceases to want to spread out his arms and shelter his beloved from their own struggle and heartache as he hopes for their future. Pain and hope.

The acknowledgement of these truths in conjunction with one another, I believe, is at the heart of our text this morning and at the heart of Lent. So, this morning, I want us to take a moment and reflect on Jesus' love for this world, even as we look upon the pain and suffering in our midst...in the Ukraine, in the divides within our own country, in the trouble we feel in our own hearts. And, I wonder if in these realities we can feel Jesus surrounding us with his arms no matter what heaviness is in our hearts...Can we hear Jesus' words for us...Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I long to gather you close to me.

To guide our reflection, I want to share with you a painting by Vincent Van Gogh called La Berceuse (The Lullaby). At first glance, you notice a woman sitting in a chair with a rope in her

hand. Nothing may seem remarkable about the image. But let's take time to uncover the deeper intent of the painting, an intent that stands to bridge the expanse of our Gospel message. The expanse between pain and hope.

Van Gogh described this painting as consolatory art for distressed hearts. The sense of consolation for Van Gogh in this particular painting begins with the woman we see sitting in a rocking chair, rope in hand. The image suggests that just off the canvas the rope is attached to a cradle. And as the woman rocks, the cradle moves back and forth, back and forth so that the baby inside is comforted to sleep. The crying stops and peace washes over the room. Van Gogh invites us to close our eyes and feel the movement of the rocking and possibly hear the lullaby sung to us to comfort our souls.

Van Gogh envisioned this painting hanging below deck in a fisherman's boat, (a literal rocking cradle) bringing forth a comforting lullaby in the midst of stormy seas. Matthew Boulton, former professor at Harvard Divinity, recalls that fishermen would often hang a picture of the Virgin Mary below deck for this very purpose, to be reminded that even in the midst of their greatest fear or pain, that God is watching over them and comforting them turning pain into hope.

That's the consolatory art for distressed hearts that Van Gogh brought to life in this painting. Boulton states that it becomes a kind of Gospel, a visual interpretation of Jesus' words to his beloved Jerusalem...seeing their unrest and welcoming them to a place of peace.

In Luke's Gospel, the pharisees have come to warn Jesus of Herod's plot to kill him. Jesus is overcome with lament; you can sense his grief and pain as he learns of Herod's intentions. But his response to that lament is what I want you to notice...he meets his lament, his pain, with mercy. Luke brings forth for us the image of Jesus as a mother hen stretching out her wings to cover her loved ones from danger. To shelter them in their distress. To protect them from pain. And even to cleanse them from their sins...those who might want him dead, Jesus welcomes them as well.

That's the lullaby Van Gogh wanted his viewers to hear within their hearts. That's the assurance he wanted to convey. In Van Gogh's own words, he wanted *La Berceuse* to sing "a lullaby in colour that radiated soothing tranquility and comfort." Or as in Luke's Gospel, we are to feel the mother hen's warmth and reassurance as she shelters her young, as she shelters us.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I long to gather you under my wings, how I long to take care of you.

Don't we all need that kind of assurance right now? It isn't the assurance that we won't experience danger or that we won't feel pain and heartache. It is, however, the assurance that God is continually opening God's arms out to us, the beloved, even in times of our sinfulness, even in times of the world's sinfulness.

And it is within that assurance that we can express our own lament...a lament for the trouble in our world. A lament for all that has gone wrong and for all of people torn apart by war and hunger, poverty and crime. A lament for the drug-addicted child or the terminally ill spouse. A lament for broken hearts and broken lives. A lament for prayers that weren't answered or miracles we are still waiting for.

Our Psalm for today reminds us..."the Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? Though war should rise up against me, yet will I put my trust in him." Even though fear and danger and pain may fall upon me, I will look for God's outstretched arms waiting to shelter me. I will listen for the lullaby comforting me with peace.

We are reminded during Lent that pain and hope go hand in hand. Life will be full of adversity and senseless violence. It will dish out things that are unjustified and unfair. We will struggle to make sense of the world and we will pray for better days. We will wrestle with our own choices and wish we could undo our own mistakes. We will hurt for those who are hurting and weep with those who are crying out for redemption.

Lent brings these things to the forefront of our faith. And, then, in that same moment, Lent reminds us that we have life still to live. We have mercy to extend and forgiveness to grant. We have peace to seek and freedom to claim. We have God's work to do...in our own hearts and for all of those other hearts who are breaking.

Jesus says... how I long to gather you under my wings, how I long to take care of you. And he spreads out his arms to shelter this hurting world. Thanks be to God. Amen.