



Rev Helen Jacobi

Lamenting

Year C Lent 2

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Luke 13:31-35

13 March 2022

In Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives there is a beautiful church called Dominus Flevit – Jesus wept. It is built in the shape of a teardrop. It is a modern church, built in 1955, but on the site of a 5th century church, which in turn was built over tombs dated as far back as 1600BC.¹

That is the way of sites in the Holy Land, each place marks more than one encounter with God and each one builds on the experience of the generation before.

In Dominus Flevit at the foot of the altar is a mosaic of a hen, her wings outstretched as she shelters her chicks.

“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!”

Jesus cries out a lament for Jerusalem. Jerusalem that is ruled by the “fox” Herod. The fox who would kill the hen if given the chance.

Interestingly some Pharisees warn Jesus about Herod, we normally see the Pharisees as being in opposition to Jesus, but here Luke has them as allies.

¹ <https://www.seetheholyland.net/church-of-dominus-flevit/>

Why have the people of Jerusalem not listened to Jesus?

They have fallen to the temptations that Cate outlined last week – the desire for power, the desire to avoid suffering, the assumption that God is on their side.

Since the time of Abraham and Sarah they have felt secure in the promise of the land and its descendants.

The tombs underneath Dominus Flevit date from the 1600s BC; Abraham may have lived about 1800BC; the faith has been passed on generation to generation and every generation falls into the temptation of assuming God is on their side and therefore not on the side of their enemy or of the foreigner.

God promises Abram “I am your shield”, I am your protector; the strange ritual of the sacrifice of the animals and birds seals this promise or covenant.

In our discussion group on last week’s readings and sermon we spoke about the “wandering Aramean” story which recites the deeds of Abraham and his descendants until they arrive in the land of promise, flowing with milk and honey.

We talked about the reality of the land which was given belonging to another people, something that can be forgotten in the way history is framed and told, in biblical times, just as it can be today.

We spoke about writing pepeha as Pakeha and the intricacies of telling our story without claiming a maunga or awa as our own.

Jesus, in the land of *his* ancestor Abraham, laments that the people cannot hear the message of love for all people: indigenous, settler, immigrant, refugee – everyone.

He looks over the city and wants to gather the people like a mother hen.

He does not choose an image from the Hebrew scriptures of a mother bear, or an eagle,² images which might have been stronger and more fierce.

He chooses a new image³ of a hen, wings outstretched, heart exposed, shade and warmth and shelter (the shield of Abraham), at the ready.⁴

The hen is absolutely at risk if the fox were to wander by.

But the hen waits arms outstretched, as they soon will be on the cross of suffering.

David Lose says “To anticipate challenge and suffering and not look away is, by definition, to make oneself vulnerable for the sake of others.”⁵

And this is not weakness which we often wrongly associate with vulnerability, but courage.

Lose again: “And so Jesus continues on to Jerusalem not to prove himself fearless or a hero, not to make a sacrifice for sin to a judgmental God, not even to combat death and the devil. Rather, Jesus marches to Jerusalem and embraces the cross that awaits him there out of profound love for the people around him, a mother’s fierce love that will stop at nothing to protect her children.”⁶

In our quest for healing this Lent Cate said last week we have to begin with knowing and facing the reality of suffering, we can’t escape it.

² <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay> Debie Thomas 6 March 2022

³ the closest reference would be Ps 17:8 Guard me as the apple of your eye: hide me under the shadow of your wings

⁴ Debie Thomas ibid

⁵ <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/02/lent-2-c-courage-and-vulnerability/>

⁶ David Lose ibid

She said we are tempted to live in a world that is not like it is.

Instead if we bring “our scattered attention to the here and now, we can uncover our remarkable resourcefulness which allows us to participate in the healing of the hurting.”⁷

Facing and knowing our suffering is step one. Then lamenting it is step two.

We lament with the psalmist “My God my God, why have you forsaken me: why are you so far from my help, and from my cry of distress?” (Psalm 22:1);

“Do not hide your face from me: or reject your servant in anger do not cast me off.” (27:11-12)

We complain with Abram “You have given me no children” and question God “how am I to know this promise?” We lament with Jesus “Jerusalem, Jerusalem the city that kills the prophets” “Ukraine, Ukraine, our hearts weep for you” “Russia, our hearts weep for you, so lost in the thralls of your violent leader”

We lament with our own pain and fear; fear for loved ones who are not well; fear for livelihoods and our economy. We lament the state of our climate crisis.

And we sit with our lament, not looking away, allowing ourselves to become vulnerable and open.

Then when Jesus invites us under the cover of the hen’s wings we will know to step forward and allow ourselves to be sheltered, rather than thinking we can manage on our own.

We will find the strength to face our pain, seek healing and find it in the company of others, who are also sheltering.

Jesus stays, arms outstretched, and invites us in.

⁷ Rev Cate Thorn, sermon 6 March 2022