

## **The Mothering Love of God – A discussion between Revd Simon and Melody**

**Sunday 10 March 2024 - Mothering Sunday**

**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! *Matthew 23.37***

### **Revd Simon**

So one of the things that we notice about Jesus from the Bible, when he spoke about God, and when he spoke about the kingdom of heaven, was that he was very good at looking at the natural world around him and taking lessons from the beauty of nature, from plants, from animals, from birds, and using them to illustrate what he wanted to teach us about God. And one of the passages that's always intrigued me was St Matthew tells us that Jesus was in Jerusalem, and he had been in Jerusalem teaching about God and trying to call people to him and to follow him. But what he noticed was this hotchpotch of political intrigue, religious faction, people doing their own thing, people living for themselves, living for the day. And he says, 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how long I have longed to gather you together as a mother hen gathers her children under her wings for protection'. That's always intrigued me; what did Jesus know about chickens? And what do chickens teach us about the love of God? So I've asked Melody to help us to understand something about the mothering love of God from a chicken. So here we have a hen, just as Jesus was talking about. So, Melody, what's your hen's name?

### **Melody**

This is Martha.

### **Revd Simon**

This is Martha. And is Martha a good hen?

### **Melody**

She's amazing, yes. She's five years old and the breed of her is a Frizzle. She's a standard Frizzle. And last year I took on a rooster called Barry, and Barry really took to Martha in a big way.

### **Revd Simon**

Oh, did he?

### **Melody**

And he didn't leave her alone. And then there were six eggs underneath her one day and I realised that she was being a little bit broody, so she stayed there and 21 days later there were six, what is termed as Sizzles. Because if you breed a Frizzle with a Silkie, which is what Barry the rooster was, you then get a Sizzle. There were all these lovely little creatures rushing about, but she was amazing as a mum and very protective and wouldn't let anybody get near her little ones.

### **Revd Simon**

Can I ask you, Melody, so Jesus sees all the busyness of Jerusalem and everybody running in their own direction, and he wants to call everyone to himself as a mother hen gathers her chicks. So how does a mother hen know when there's danger nearby? Essentially, how would she call her chicks to herself?

**Melody**

She just senses, she just calls out.

**Revd Simon**

She makes a special noise.

**Melody**

She does, yes. She squawks and then they all just come running, yes, literally. And then she puts her wings out and they all go underneath; until they get a certain size and then they just sit around her, but when they're small, they all sit collectively underneath her.

**Revd Simon**

And what sort of things does a mother hen teach her chicks?

**Melody**

She will teach them how to eat.

**Revd Simon**

How to eat? Yes.

**Melody**

So they follow her, don't they, Martha?

**Revd Simon**

Teach them how to fly?

**Melody**

The Friggles don't fly.

**Revd Simon**

They don't fly. We were worried, a bit worried that if Melody let go, we might have a flying chicken going around the church. We weren't too keen about that.

**Melody**

The nature of her feathers, so that they don't lay flat against the skin, so that prevents her from being able to take off, like all the other girls that I've got, I let them out of the coop in the morning and they all take off. It's like Heathrow airport. They run and then they take off. So if I bought them, they'd be down there. They run towards the light.

**Revd Simon**

So as somebody who looks after a number of hens and sees them with their babies, is a mother hen sacrificial? Will she give her life for her babies?

**Melody**

Yes.

**Revd Simon**

Can you tell us how that would happen?

**Melody**

If, for instance, there was a sparrowhawk that came; when they're very tiny you wouldn't let them out of the coop, but if they start to have a little bit more movement then you can open the door and then they will go out and follow mum. But if there is something like a sparrowhawk, or if there was something in the undergrowth, she's picking up all the time, she's looking up to the sky with her head on the side, and she would go towards that and use all her strength to fight them to her death. She will fight to the death for her children. She will.

**Revd Simon**

So if Jesus was trying to help us to understand something about the mothering love of God from a hen, what would you think he must have seen? The Bible doesn't tell us that Jesus had chickens at home, but he must have observed them to be able to use that phrase. What do you think? What would you see looking at your hen? What would Jesus be getting at? What does it teach us about the love of God for each one of us, do you think? Big question.

**Melody**

I think that for us it's that we are all collectively like those chicks. We're like the chicks and he provides the wings. He's the mother hen. We're all able to crawl underneath his wings at times and feel safe.

**Revd Simon**

So we can all crawl under the wings of Christ Jesus and be safe. Fantastic. Well, like at a baptism, we walk the baby up and down so everybody can see the baby. Would you like to walk your hen up and down so everybody can see your hen?

Jesus was also quoting one of the Psalms where Psalm 91 says that in the words of God, he wants to protect his people under his wings. So Jesus was making the words of God his own from the psalms. So perhaps, Melody, after the service, if anyone wants to ask you; Melody can sell you eggs if you like, as well. So have a word with her about that.