

Luke 13:31-35

At the very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." He said to them, "go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' 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! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'

"Remembering Our Job Description"

The wag wrote, "We are born naked, wet, and hungry. Then things get worse." And that, friends, is exactly why we need one another. It is in community that our nakedness is covered, our wetness dried, our hunger satisfied (Listen With the Heart. Joan Chittister, p.69). After birth, it is our mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers who give us the care that we need. It is also in our families that we learn how to care for others. "You are a member of the British royal family," Queen Mary said to her daughter Queen Elizabeth. "We are never tired and we all love hospitals" (Ibid. p.65).

In my family of origin, I learned how I needed to care for others from the traditional English children story, **The Little Red Hen**.

Once upon a time there was a little red hen. She lived with a pig, a duck and a cat. They all lived in a house which the little red hen liked to keep clean and tidy. The little red hen worked hard at her jobs all day. The others never helped. Although they said they meant to, they were all far too lazy. The pig liked to grunt in the mud outside, the duck used to swim in the pond all day, and the cat enjoyed lying in the sun, purring. One day

the little red hen was working in the garden when she found a grain of corn. "Who will plant this grain of corn?" she asked.

"Not I," grunted the pig from his muddy patch in the garden.

"Not I," quacked the duck from her pond.

"Not Who I," purred the cat from his place in the sun.

So the little red hen went to look for a nice bit of earth, scratched it with her feet and planted the grain of corn. During the summer the grain of corn grew. First it grew into a tall green stalk, then it ripened in the sun until it had turned a lovely golden color. The little red hen saw that the corn was ready for cutting. "Who will help me cut the corn?" asked the little red hen.

"Not I," grunted the pig from his muddy patch in the garden.

"Not I," quacked the duck from her pond.

"Not I," purred the cat from his place in the sun.

"Very well then, I will cut it myself," said the little red hen. Carefully she cut the stalk and took out all the grains of corn from the husks. "Who will take the corn to the mill, so that it can be ground into flour?" asked the little red hen.

"Not I," grunted the pig from his muddy patch in the garden.

"Not I," grunted the duck from her pond.

"Not I," purred the cat from his place in the sun.

So the little red hen took the corn to the mill herself, and asked the miller if he would be so kind as to grind it into flour. In time the miller sent a little bag of flour down to the house where the little red hen lived with the pig and the duck and the cat. "Who will help me to make the flour into bread?" asked the little red hen.

"Not I," grunted the pig from his muddy patch in the garden.

"Not I," quacked the duck from her pond.

"Not I," purred the cat from his place in the sun.

"Very well," said the little red hen. "I shall make the bread myself." She went into her neat little kitchen. She mixed the flour into dough. She kneaded the dough and put it into the oven to bake. Soon there was a lovely smell of hot fresh bread. It filled all the corners of the house and wafted out into the garden. The pig came into the kitchen from his muddy patch in the garden, the duck came in from the pond and the cat left his

place in the sun. When the little red hen opened the oven door the dough had risen up and had turned into the nicest, most delicious looking loaf of bread any of them had seen. "Who is going to eat this bread?" asked the little red hen.

"I will," grunted the pig.

"I will," quacked the duck.

"I will," purred the cat.

"Oh no, you won't," said the little red hen. "I planted the seed, I cut the corn, I took it to the mill to be made into flour, and I made the bread, all by myself. I shall now eat the loaf all by myself." The pig, the duck and the cat all stood and watched as the little red hen ate the loaf all by herself. It was delicious and she enjoyed it, right to the very last crumb.

"The wag wrote . . . There are things we do in life, because the groups to which we belong require that they be done by us or they may not be done at all" (Chittister, p. 65). Churches are no exception. The only difference, however, is that in communities of faith, members are also required to take care of the needs of God. In our tradition, the way in which we take care of Divine things is by saying, "Yes" to God's invitation to be in covenantal relationship with the Lord.

Sounds great, but what exactly does being in covenantal relationship with God mean? According to the Hebrew Scriptures and Biblical New Testament, when our Maker needed human beings to take care of the earth like God would do it, the Lord decided to jump into human history. In the first covenant in Genesis, God did so by saying to Abraham and Sarah: I will be your God and you will be my people. Then their Maker promised to bless them with descendants as numerous as the stars and good fruit bearing land. The promise sounded so good, Abraham said, "It's a deal," packed up his family, and went where God told him to go.

That was God's first covenant of faith with people. It was a covenant of mutuality that was dependent upon the principle and exercise of free will in both parties. It was a reciprocal relationship in which both parties promised to do agreed upon things. Unlike covenantal

relationships forged between people, however, it was not a relationship of equality. In a covenantal relationship between God and people, The Creator sets the terms and the created get to agree to the life giving terms. Israel's God also gets to periodically update the terms of covenant with people of faith. That's why now, like the psalmist who had faith that he would "see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living," we believe that this will be fulfilled by our obedience to the Ten Commandments. It is also why, like the disciples of Jesus, we believe that as we walk in the footsteps of Jesus . . . peace and goodwill will come upon on earth. Sounds great. But we all know that there is an inherent problem in The Holy One's covenantal way of growing us up in the Divine image. That problem is: every one of us falls short in keeping the faith and in holding up our end of the bargain. Mostly we do this today by reframing God's covenantal relationship with us as a personal, privatized affair with the Lord in which we set the terms of promise.

In the Protestant brand of the Christian church, one way that we help each other remember the terms of our covenantal relationship with God is through the sacrament of Baptism. In Baptism we are named, claimed as a Beloved Child of God, forgiven of sin, and ordained as a priest. In a UCC Daily Devotional (Feb. 23, 2010) pastor Quinn Caldwell reminded us of our priesthood status and duties:

Our baptism is our entry into the priesthood of all believers. In case you forgot the job description, here's what priests do: They point to God in the ordinary things of the world, like water and bread and babies. They say words of power to change the world, words like "You are beloved," "Peace be with you," "God bless you." They make sacrifices to please God, like sending money to Haiti instead of going to the mall, like working in the soup kitchen instead of playing Wii all day. They show up at births and deaths, at weddings and funerals, at sickbeds and prisons, to pray and bless and make sure the people know that they are not alone. Here's what priests do: they help the world know that God is alive, that blessings abound, that love will win. It's what you were ordained for; now go for it. Amen.