

Franklin Elementary, Rice Lake, WI – I was in 5th grade.

We had a new student, who had just moved to the school - Matt Jaspersen -
And we were playing on the playground.

There was the typical jungle gym equipment- slides, swings, monkey bars. But there was one particular activity that gathered a crowd. The JUMP. In our minds, it was a deadly feat. Few dared do it. But if you made it, you were treated like royalty.

The JUMP consisted of standing up on a green, rusted, metal bar – parallel to the monkey bars. Probably 10 feet off the ground, and 6 or 7 feet apart. And you jumped, reaching as far you can, grasping for the safe landing of your hands on the monkey bars.

I never could do it. But Matt did. He hesitated at first, but as a new student, he needed to prove something. More than that...he was dared to do it. C'mon Matt...are you chicken?!? So he climbed to the top of those bars – and he jumped...

No one wants to be a chicken. Or turn down a dare.

Being a chicken, running away – is the worst thing you could do. Usually it is the boys that - ahem – EGG – each other on. I dare you! Or are you too chicken?

Jesus is never called chicken, but he is dared at times – by the fox, Herod, the Pharisees, Satan tempting - they try to trick Jesus into saying or doing something he may regret. They are trying to get him to condemn himself.

When Jesus and Satan were in the wilderness, Satan asks Jesus to jump off the temple and let the angels catch him. Jesus refused, not wanting to tempt God.

If that were an elementary playground, Jesus would be just another chicken.

The Pharisees warn Jesus, but I wonder if it is also a trick.

If Jesus heeds the warning, he is likely to be seen as chicken, a prophet who claims to do God's work but then disappears at the first sign of trouble.

Jesus refuses to run away.

Jesus is not on a journey to get *away* from it all. He is on a journey to get *into* it all, into the heart of the people of God -- even when they are determined to destroy him. Even when he is dared, tricked, pressured. Even when he is insulted. Even if he is called chicken.

The irony is, Jesus embraces being a chicken, Jesus wants it. He calls himself a chicken. A mother hen.

That seems a little odd. A chicken is not the most desirable animal. Maybe deep fried on our dinner plate, but not as the image of our God.

There are many other alternative biblical images of Messiah Savior that could be used.

- A lion, in Hosea, who uses strength to intimidate and crush enemies with a single blow, a military savior-king who promises safety and security in the face of border incursions and terrorist attacks.
 - Or an eagle, who soars above earthly dreariness, carrying followers to mountaintop, like in Deuteronomy.
- Or even a bear, a powerful, prophetic savior who charges in, to protect its children, or maul those who pick on us, in a story of prophet Elisha in 2nd Kings.

Surely, we don't need a chicken to be savior.

But God flips these stories upside down.

We are the Jewish crowd.

We want a messiah who rules with fists, not words.

We want a savior who takes vengeance out on the evil – not one who forgives.

We want a God who follows our expectations – Jesus breaks the rules, boundaries, and pushes out of our comfort.

We wanted a very powerful ruler to defeat the Romans. A lion, an eagle, a bear. Not a chicken.

And even if it was a chicken – we want a powerful Fighting Gamecock – not some mother hen.

This savior is unexpected, God operates in unexpected ways, and we have to ask ourselves, what kind of Savior do we want?

A mother hen who loves her chicks so fiercely that she offers shelter beneath her wings – is a different sort of savior.

When the evil fox prowls, the chicks are not left to fight for themselves. The hen puts her life on the line to save them.

That is good news. We worship a God who loves us, and sticks up for us, who saves us from evil, with God's own life.

You may have heard this story, but I think it captures Jesus' image.

The story is about a farmer, and his tractor explodes, catching the barn on fire. And after all is cleaned up, they find this poor hen - charred to death. But a small peep comes from under her wing. And there are the 10 chicks, safe and sound, protected. Giving life, to save another.

My friend read this story...he was mortified. It's a terribly sad story. Poor chicken. Poor chicks with no mommy.

The disciples felt they had lost Jesus on the cross, as he took his last breath. What if the mother hen was resurrected? The hen that gives her life for us, also lives again. That is Easter.

Maybe we need a mother savior, who cares for us in ways that we never imaged. Jesus has a way of empowering women and female language and forcing us to look at the world through different lenses.

When we are faced with temptation, fear, evil, sin. When we are broken, and can't fight for ourselves. When we just need to bury ourselves chest of a mother, safe, secure, taken care of. We find comfort in the wings.

It is crowded beneath those wings, God invites all kinds of animals to take refuge under her wings, but there is enough room. A chicken is not the not the savior we imagined, but she is the savior we need.

For a brief moment, Matt grabbed the monkey bars. But it was early morning recess and dew clung to the metal, and his hands slipped...Matt fell flat on his back.

Daring, risking, tricking, pressuring people is a way of power – but it is not the way of God. The way of God, is not about strength of power, it is about the strength of love. The way of peace and inclusion.

God protects, welcomes, nurtures. God is steadfast to us. God is our mother hen. And we are chickens, for Christ.