Well, you are all going to find this out about me, if you haven’t already … I am a bird watcher. So is Larry. Much of my family is, actually – twitchers, the lot of us. We all put out bird feeders. My little sister makes suet. When we see new birds, we try to commit to memory their markings, beak shapes, size, so we can go back and look up what kind of bird it is, and keep track of our sightings. Seeing different birds is one of my favorite parts of traveling … the hoopoe (hoo-poo) of Dubai, the crows of Iceland, the swans of Ireland.

For the most part, birds seem so graceful and proficient in their flight. They fill God’s creation with their songs and exclamations. And most of us go about our daily lives not really worried about the birds flying all around us.

And yet, if you’ve ever been attacked by a bird, you know these creatures – which I typically see as poetry with wings – are not to be fooled with.

It is one of the most concrete memories of my childhood. We were living in Waukegan. I was about 12. I couldn’t wait to turn 12 because then I could get a job. I don’t know why I thought everyone got jobs at 12, but I did. Just like I thought all men became President of the U.S. at the age of 35.

Anyway, I was 12, and I did get a job. I became a Chicago Tribune newspaper delivery girl. I learned a lot in that job. I learned delivering the paper was one thing but reminding some people they also needed to pay for it was another.

I learned that it felt good to earn some money and that stuff was more expensive than I realized. I learned the Sunday paper was a beast to assemble and carry on cold winter mornings.

And one day, as I walked my route through a neighborhood, I learned that if you walk too close to a tree where a mother blue jay has just hatched her young, you are in trouble and you will run screaming and slightly traumatized as fast as you can to get away from her.

I have experienced the other side of this instinctual motherly protection too.

When I was a young mother going to college, I had met this guy. He was a sweet guy, actually. He liked birds. Most of the time he had a very kind and gentle demeanor. He fished a lot, and he brought a fresh catch over for me and my daughter once. He taught me how to cook fish. And he also made poor choices at times, particularly when it came to alcohol – and sometimes other people’s cars.

One night of poor choices, he decided to come over, unannounced. But it was late, and my daughter was already in bed, I had class the next day, and he wasn’t his usual kind and sweet self. He had been drinking. I told him he needed to leave, he couldn’t come in. It took some convincing. I got stern with him in standing my ground and then my daughter woke up and came out of her bedroom.

I heard her before I saw her. All she said was “Mama?” And there was something in her tone, in that unseen connection between mother and child that made me know instinctually she was frightened. I felt the hairs on the back of my neck rise.

I turned to look at her and that was when my friend made his big mistake. He tried to take advantage of the distraction and push into my apartment. Suddenly I turned into a 5’2” version of the Hulk. I physically removed him from my apartment. He had no defense against me, and he turned tail and got out of there as fast as he could while I gathered my frightened child into my arms, amazed at my strength and instinct.

Everything was okay in the end. My friend’s scratches and bruises healed. Maintenance came over and repaired the door the next day. My friend apologized. I forgave him but kept him at arm’s length after that. I still pray for him from time to time. I pray he has found the people and paths to help him be that wonderfully sweet person God created him to be, rather than the unhealthy person the disease of addiction brings out of him.

It is probably the circumstance of having this reading from Luke before us this week that has brought these distant memories to mind, especially as I’ve also watched the footage of the people of Ukraine, mostly mothers with their children, fleeing all this horrendous and indefensible violence and aggression.

It has been gut wrenching to watch this humanitarian crisis unfold and feel so incapable of helping in any concrete way. And so, we pray.

And – as Christians – our faith stirs us to put hands and feet to our prayers when we can too. There are more and more ways we can help coming to light. I’ve been sharing some of those opportunities already and I’ll continue to do so.

We have a local opportunity this week through an effort called Townships for Ukraine. Next Saturday they will be accepting donations of new medical supplies, like gauze and band-aids. Also, tea and coffee, some clothing and other items like baby bottles and flashlights. There is a full list posted out in the narthex.

After talking with a few people who are feeling the Spirit stir them to pray and act this week, I thought we could take up a collection of items here at the church and support this effort as a faith community. We will likely need a couple of people to help deliver the items, so please come and see me if you can help.

There are also ways to make donations to organizations like Lutheran World Relief or Lutheran Disaster Response that are supporting the churches and organizations working on the borders as refugees cross. These organizations have shown themselves to be trustworthy partners in getting our resources to the vulnerable people we feel called to help.

And we do keep praying. And maybe pray a little more deeply for Ukrainian and Russian mothers. The power of prayer combined with the instinct and capabilities of our underdog sisters halfway around the world has the potential to change the world and bring peace for even more mothers and children. God is at work there. And so, we pray, we watch for those glimmers of God breaking in and then we give witness to God’s work by telling others what we see. Do not underestimate the power and efficacy of our prayer. Do not underestimate what God can do through the fierce and persistent will of a mother whose child is endangered.

So, even if you haven’t been attacked by a blue jay or come up against a mama, or considered the instinctual behavior of a Ukrainian mother, I hope you perceive the attitude and capability of the protective mother as we hear this fierce and persistent tone in Jesus’ teaching this week.

Because in it we have this understated and often underestimated image of God as a broody hen with the fierce and persistent will to gather all of Jerusalem – all of the known world – under protective wings.

We can hear the tone in Jesus’ choice of words right off the bat. The Pharisees want Jesus as far from Jerusalem as possible, immediately. There are different opinions on what motivates them here. Maybe they really felt some concern for Jesus. Maybe they just didn’t want to deal with him and the “good trouble” he tended to cause. Whatever the reason, they were trying to convince him to retreat, to leave God’s people to fend for themselves in a holy city that habitually killed God’s holy prophets.

Now, when it comes to chickens, what dangerous predators come to mind? A fox! And what does Jesus say regarding Herod who wants to kill him? “You tell that fox for me …” he says. (Luke 13:32) The broody hen in Jesus is already awake, already sees Herod the fox approaching. And like a protective hen, God in Jesus will not be deterred from completing the trek to Jerusalem, where Herod the fox waits to kill him. Like a fierce mama, God in Jesus will continue to heal and protect all God’s beloved children. Like a Ukrainian mother, God in Jesus has the will to risk everything, even death, if it means life for her children.

This is a powerful image to consider this 2nd week of Lent and our pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the cross, where our God, in Jesus, with the fierceness and persistent will of a broody hen makes the ultimate sacrifice so we may have life, now and forever. Thanks be to our mothering God. Amen.