

A sermon preached Almaden Valley United Church of Christ  
San Jose, CA  
Date: January 10, 2010  
Rev. Kevin M. Smith  
Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 55:1-6; Luke 3:15-22

### *On the Wings of the Dove*

Doves play a central role in our scriptural literature. In the Hebrew scriptures doves can be symbols of God's messengers and appropriate sacrifices of the poor people to the temple during festival times. In the Christian scriptures doves light upon Jesus as God proclaims his satisfaction with Jesus' life. There are depictions of doves hovering over Mary's head to symbolize her "submissive innocence" to the Spirit<sup>1</sup> This is not surprising, of course, since Mary and Jesus were Jewish. Norman Rubin, an Israeli writer, writes that

In Judaism, the dove signified the love of God for [the] Chosen People, the Israelites. White doves, signs of purity, were sacrificial offerings offered for purification at the Temple in Jerusalem. The Old Testament symbolized the dove in various forms. The dove was frequently used in the "Song of Songs," largely to convey terms of endearment: in their behavior, the doves paired for a long time. "Oh how beautiful, your eyes are like doves ..." (Songs 1: 15). "Oh that I had wings of a dove to fly away and be at rest ..." (Psalm 55: 6).

Here is a modern story from a woman author about the nature and appreciation of doves:

#### A DOVE STORY RETOLD: JASMINE AND JEWEL (by) KATHLEEN

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<sup>1</sup> See Rubin, Norman A. *The Dove* at <http://198.62.75.1/www1/ofm/mag/MAen9905.html>

Fluttering and cooing the Mourning Doves chased each other back and forth across my balcony porch. They made such a commotion I began watching them in earnest. Mating season was in full swing! After covering the potting soil with loosely laid straws and grass, the female dove perched on the empty window box planter and laid two cream-colored, one-inch eggs. I knew nothing about dove mating habits, but was thrilled I'd been chosen to observe this "up close and personal" process.

Quickly, I learned the male and female participate equally in the nesting vigil. The female usually sits all night, while the male takes daylight duty. My routine became as regular as theirs, as I popped in and out to check on them when I heard the familiar whistling of their wings. I learned that "it takes a village" to raise the squabs or baby doves. As the two nestlings grew, they needed more attention and seeds than their "parents" could supply, so other doves flew in and took turns feeding them. In a sense, these doves were my children too! So I named the first-born Jasmine, and her younger sibling, Jewel, aka. Little J. Tiny, delicate, so exquisite! I couldn't help falling in love with them! Excited and enthralled, I reported their daily progress to my friends who began calling me the "dove lady."

While I was at work, Jasmine tried her wings and fledged. Naturally, I looked forward to little Jewel following her sister. Oddly, she was left alone in the planter for an entire day. As the evening became cooler I anxiously awaited her parents return; mamma dove in particular. Her over zealous nature had become evident when I moved the planter and she furiously flapped her wings at me. Several different doves came and went as Little J bravely flapped her fragile wings, beak uplifted expectantly for feedings. Above the porch, on the air

conditioner ledge, the adult doves and Jasmine, were peering down and cooing softly. . .but strangely, none flew down to feed Little J. An awful realization suddenly hit me; something was physically wrong with baby Jewel, something only her parents knew. She wouldn't be able to survive, and nature's plan was to abandon her. It was a gut wrenching feeling. Tears welled in my throat. This can't be happening!\_

The next morning Little J was huddled beneath the planter, her tiny body chilled by the cool night air. Panicked, I desperately tried to revive her. Surprisingly, I succeeded for a few hours. I gently picked her up and cuddled her fragile body between my hands. Feet wobbling, she tried to stand. As the morning sun beat down, she seemed to revive in its warmth. Her legs got a little stronger and she managed to walk around the planter. I tried unsuccessfully giving her water with a dropper. She was waning fast due to lack of nourishment. I felt. . .so helpless!

Then I remembered about a wildlife rehabilitation center only five minutes from my apartment. Frantically phoning Wildlife Works, Inc, I gently placed Little J in a shoe box and drove top speed to deliver her, praying it wasn't too late. When I called later that evening to check on her, she'd passed away. Overcome with emotions, I became the grieving, bereaved parent. I cried for days! Nothing has touched me so much in a long time. The photo's I took, a poem I wrote, commemorate Jewel's impact on my life.

As if to counteract my sadness over Jewel's loss, Jasmine, fluttered to a stop and landed on the porch railing. She perched calmly for a long time, seeming to sense my grief, trying to cheer me up. "Look, I'm here, I'm fine. Don't be sad!" she seemed to say. Grabbing my

camera, I snapped several final pictures of Jasmine before she left the security of her birth home forever.<sup>2</sup>

This is a wonderful story so rich in symbolism and meaning; so true to our lives. The human need for nesting and taking care of one another while at the same time the imperative of growing up and leaving home sometimes to great success and sometimes, flawed by our weaknesses to pain and death. The story talks of the need for community. The communities of our lives provides seeds for our growth and ability to thrive and survive in the world. But, the community cannot always save us; sometimes our efforts at rescue fail. But even in the midst of failure little moments of connection provide us comfort and consolation just like when Jasmine, after the death of the young dove, lighted on the porch railing seeming to tell the author to hang in there and provided her with something so simple—her company. Sometimes words and gifts and things aren't necessary, just to have someone care about us enough to visit us and hold us in their heart is the balm that is needed.

<sup>22</sup>*And the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."* (Luke 3:22) The dove was a garbage bird, much like the pigeon or crow. In the time of Jesus, it was the poor people who were allowed to bring doves to the temple for the ritual sacrifices. The people who were more well off were expected to bring lambs, animals of great substance and value. How does God come to Jesus, though? What is chosen to signal of Jesus to listen because God is about to speak? Not a lamb or a king or an army legion or a wealthy merchant or a bar of gold. None of these things. A lowly dove is the messenger of God. God sometimes comes to us in unexpected packages and in what we might believe to be insignificant moments and contacts. Our God is not a God of costly advertising campaigns or slick merchandising. Our God is not a God of battalions of warriors. Our God is not a God that promises us lives

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://beanerywriters.wordpress.com/2008/10/15/a-dove-story-retold-jasmine-and-jewel/>

that are easy or painless. Our God comes to us softly on the wings of a dove, or a prayer, or a smile, or a self-sacrificing gesture, or through the gentle touch of a friend or a loved one or even a stranger in our time of need. On the wings of dove God lifts us to do the right thing and to keep on going even in times that are confusing or tough. Try to be a dove for someone today. Keep watch out for doves hovering beside you. Amen.

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