

We'd been raised in a Sunday school world. A Howdy doody, and Ozzie and Harriet and Leave it to Beaver and Father Knows Best world.

We'd been raised in a Memorial Day parades world, a Fourth of July celebrations world, in a God is on America's side world.

We'd been raised in a believing the Bible world, in a ministers are trustworthy world, in a churches are holy places world.

And in the winter of 1969 it seemed to us that the most courageous thing a person could do was to doubt.

We were together in a class on Existentialism, reading writers from Europe who were calling into question all the pillars upon which western society had been built.

We swam in a sea of doubt, doubting God, doubting the goodness of America, doubting that there was any meaning.

What an act of courage was our doubt! We disdained our parents, whose money was keeping us in college, and we disdained churchgoers who obviously had not thought very deeply about things, and we especially disdained the ones carrying guns in Vietnam, not courageous enough to doubt.

Maybe instead of reading European philosophers, we should have been reading of Abram.

The word of the Lord came to him, "Do not be afraid Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

This was not the first time the Lord had made the promise, years before the Lord had promised Abram descendants and land if he would only go where the Lord directed him. So Abram had left his Father's land, the land where he was known and become a wanderer heading for a land the Lord would show him.

But after years of following there was nothing to show for his faith. No land, no descendants.

"O Lord God, what will you give me for I continue childless.

Abram wanted some proof. Faith had turned to doubt.

The Lord took him outside. "Look toward the heaven and count the stars if you are able to count them. So shall your descendants be."

He wanted one descendant. And God showed him stars.

He was like a beggar on the street asking for a quarter for a cup of coffee.

"Oh, not a quarter for you. Someday I'll give you millions.

But the beggars hand remains empty.

And yet the next words we read are these: And Abram believed the Lord and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

With nothing to look at but stars, Abram believed.

The scriptures tell us nothing of what was in Abram's heart and mind at that moment. I'd like to think it was this:

The one who is making this promise to me, placed every star. Who am I next to the one who with a word made all things. I'll believe.

So many times you are Abram. A child is sick, God has spoken of God's care, yet the fever is rising.

I will never leave you or forsake you, the promise has been spoken, and yet in a time of grief you feel so abandoned by God.

"I will not slumber" the Lord promises even as children are starving, the weak and powerless crushed by the oppressors.

Once I thought it took courage to doubt, the courage of telling the truth.

But can a painting be known by looking at a single brushstroke? Can a mountain be comprehended by considering a single molecule? Will the faithfulness of God be judged by a single moment in my life?

Abram believed and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Things were right between God and Abram when Abram believed.

Jesus spoke of another moment in time. A fox on the prowl, a mother hen scurrying to gather the chicks under her wing, the chicks scattering in their doubt.

That day Herod played the part of the fox, threatening Jesus, part of the Roman establishment that would soon destroy Jerusalem.

The people of Jerusalem were the chicks, invited to take refuge under Jesus' wing.

And Jesus was the mother hen, soon to be gobbled up by a predator named Pilate.

In that moment of time it must have seemed that anywhere would be safer than to be under Jesus' care. Even his best friends scattered in doubt and fear.

But on the third day God took them all outside and showed them the stars. The whole painting was seen, the mountain. Jesus was raised from the dead.

He is the mother hen who shelters you under his wing. Everywhere the foxes are snapping, the dogs are growling, the wolves are snarling. Sickness and evil and death seem so much more powerful than the hen who gathers.

Will you run? Will you flee looking for some other shelter, some protector with longer fangs and sharper claws? Will doubt scatter you, leave you alone?

Or will you let the one who tossed the stars into space and who raised Jesus from the dead, gather you under the mother hen's wing? Will you stay under that wing, the wing of Jesus, remaining there in the courage of faith?

Will you pray for one another, and believe?

I know that I do not have that much courage - not courage enough to believe. I always have courage enough to doubt - doubt is easy. But to believe I will need you. I will need your prayers for me, and your encouragement, and your reminders. You will need to hold me under the wing of the mother hen. Keep me from straying.

Or else I will get afraid, and run and the foxes will have their way with me.

And when the fox sinks his teeth into me - and he will, for the mother hen will not keep the fox of suffering and death away, not even the fox of sin away - when the fox sinks his teeth into me, hold onto me tight. Tell me of the third day, remind me whose wing I am under. God will give me faith even then through you.

Together under the wing of the mother hen - together in Christ. God grant you the courage to live your life there.