

A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

By Burt L. Burleson

“There Will Always be... a Choice”

The second in a Lenten series on spiritual principles

Luke 13: 31-35

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When we read the gospels carefully, we become aware of something important... and it is a reflection of what we as Christians profess... That in Jesus, the Word of God is present. The Wisdom that is the blue print of all creation... the blue print of reality... that wisdom, is flowing through this One and into the world.

So... in any moment... any story, any teaching, there is the possibility of hearing and seeing beyond the immediate moment... Something always happening and Jesus is dealing with that agenda but there's always some eternal agenda flowing.

Here... in this moment... Jesus is just being Jesus and he gets onto a barnyard theme. He's got that metaphor going and like any good teacher, he stays with it.

It seems like he just reacts his way into it though... just off the cuff. **“Herod???? That fox????”**

And he was... he was sleazy and bad... and came by it naturally. He was a real “son of a fox,” remember? Remember his dad trying to kill Jesus by slaughtering children. He even killed his own family (we know from other sources) to keep his throne secure.

Well... his son learned from an expert. And Jesus names what he is... **“He's a fox”** meaning, he's despicable and sneaky and cannot ever be trusted... **and what's more,**” Jesus says, **“He's not calling the shots for me. I've already decided I'll be headed to Jerusalem.”**

And you can see his mood just shift when he says it. And scripture flows out of him... He's quoting a non-cannonical book, **“Jerusalem, Jerusalem.... You kill the prophets and stone those sent to you.”**

And then it's back to the barnyard... **“So many times I've wanted to gather you in like a mother hen would her chicks... so secure under her wings...”** You can just hear the longing in his voice.

And not hard for us to get there emotionally even if we weren't raised on a farm. Anyone ever hurt for a loved-one headed in the wrong direction? And you wish you could turn them around... You wish they'd quit hurting themselves... But you can't make them stop, can you?

And so the words, **“You weren't willing...”** aren't too very far from what we've known.

Kurt said a friend of his composed a piece based on this text for strings... It's not hard to imagine how it sounds and how it might make your heart feel so raw. **“I wanted you... but you didn't want me... You weren't willing.”**

And so, the barnyard becomes a real mess. Staying with the imaginations Jesus has stirred and prompted.... There's a fox about and all the chicks can sense it... and it's just chaos everywhere.

Chicks and chickens running about...

Scampering here and chirping there...Mother hen losing it. Squawking.

It's madness.

A lot like this anxious world we live in, where everyone seems to be driven so by all the wrong things. And it's so noisy and there's so much momentum towards chaos that for any chick it's nearly impossible to hear your mother's plaintive clucking.

We just all get caught up in everything that's happening in the barnyard. Sort of mass hysteria or at best, “group think”... “group consciousness.” It's what someone has called, “wego” playing off the idea of the ego that is so blind... only this is all of us... all being blind at once.

A prophet comes to Jerusalem... sent by God... and they all start throwing rocks. **“Why are you throwing rocks?” “We don’t know, this just feels better.”**

It’s still happening... people ridiculously throwing rocks... and worse... **“Why are you people doing that?????” “We don’t know this just feels better...” “I don’t know... they threw one at me first...” “I don’t know... I just know I hate them.”**

It gets crazy in the barnyard... doesn’t it? ...Especially with a fox about.

“Why are you guys running up your credit cards buying all those things?” “We don’t really know... someone said we needed this and it just feels better.”

“Why do all you people think that... or believe that, and why are you shouting so loud about it?” “We don’t really know, but it just feels better if we yell a lot and decide who’s for us and against us.”

The mother hen keeps patiently clucking but the barnyard being the barnyard... it’s just hard to hear...

And what’s more, we’ve all seen what a fox can do to a hen and even when we slow down and think just a bit it seems like it’d be much better to be on the fox’s side... huh?

Or... at the very least... employ the fox’s ways and methods.

“He may have the wrong end in mind but he has the best means and we have to be realistic and live in this world and all, so, pardon me, if I don’t commit suicide and go sit under mom’s wing.”

No... you’re right... I’m not willing... I only stand a chance with the fox if I act like a fox.”

Of course... it’s often not so calculated... We’re just chicks running scared and the barnyard seems so unsafe and the more everyone chirps the more I forget where I really belong. And when I forget that, “wego” takes over.

“Why are you guys eating that fruit?” “We don’t really know, but it’s better than not knowing what’s going on around here... having to trust didn’t feel good... and one of the animals, that snake over there, thought this might help.”

“Why are you folks making a calf out of gold?” “We don’t know... but this sure feels better than all that waiting.”

“Why are you people shouting “Give us Barabus?”” Cuz.... We just are, that’s why. Crucify him... yeah... crucify him.”

“Jerusalem... Jerusalem... I long to gather you in under my wings but you are never willing... cluck, cluck, cluck!”

Do you ever wonder why he didn’t do more than cluck? I mean, I know Jesus is working the barnyard metaphor here... and maybe it would be unhen like... But why not go grab all your babies and pull them in... Force them up under your wings and make them be where they belong, there in the brood?

Why not be a better hen, a more controlling hen, especially given the fact that you know good and well that the fox is going to turn your babies into a 12 course meal? Why?

And, as long as we’re asking...

Why put that tree in the garden in the first place? Seems sort of like a set-up to me.

Why make your people wait in the desert... so that they’re tempted to find some other god?

Why say to them at that river, “Choose you this day, whom you will serve?” Why give them a choice at all.

And if you didn’t want them to kill your prophets... why not make it more clear which prophets they were supposed to listen to? Better yet, why not write your messages on a wall or in the sky?

Why is everything so hidden? Why show up so unannounced in a baby, in a manger, in a po-dunk town?

Why make your hometown Nazareth for crying out loud? No one's expecting good things out of that place?

Why tell folks to shut up about all your miracles?

You're not making it easy... Cluck louder or something...Be more obvious, more forceful... quit giving us so many options.

And now, it's time to listen with another ear and hear the deeper wisdom flowing into and through the barnyard. **"You weren't willing."** It seems we have a choice. We have a will... God gave us a will. Why?

Because love left him no other option. His own being, his very nature, which is Trinitarian love, leaves him no option.

If you can let your mind soar for a moment beyond the barnyard and remember our confession that God is relational. There is Father, Son, and Spirit, each unique... no one person being absorbed into the other but each of them freely, sacrificially pouring self into the other. Remember that... think on it and know that it is the building block of all reality.

Creation flows from that loving truth that what is ultimately loving cannot absorb what it loves. Love can't eradicate what it loves. If the object of your love is diminished, it isn't love. There is always I, and there is always Thou...Love must always create a space for that to be true.

In less philosophical terms... though you call some, and always keep your cell phone at your side, when your kids go off to college you don't bug them too much... not if you want them to someday be in a real relationship with you. There's got to be a choice.

So, God, infinite God... from love, through love, because of love, creates a being who is free. ... Such... risk! What a divine roll of the dice... but that's what love demands.

As one writer put it, God... Limitless God... limits himself creating a space where we are free. God's omnipotence is expressed most profoundly in limitation. Divine love makes room for your "no". (Clement, 37) Because?

Because control and conformity aren't the eternal end game... It's transformation. We're created free because God has a thing for becoming...God loves seeing a seed become a daisy... We're free in order that we might become, that we might blossom, and find our fulfillment as human beings.

And so, as Maximus the Confessor put it, **"We're tragically free."** And the whole thing from the barnyard to our busy, blustering world... the whole creation is vulnerable. Because God chooses to stand at the door and knock, it's all vulnerable.

And God too is vulnerable. Have you ever loved someone, truly and deeply loved and not been vulnerable? The cross is the place where God's nature... his loving vulnerability... leads. This is where the heart of God gets named.

It's such a strange thing to so many people... the cross. Always has been and I'm certain we as Christians miss much of its meaning. It is not God looking to get enough punishment so justice is done and he can let you into heaven someday. It's not that...How could you call that love...

It is love.

It is God being vulnerable to us and to all that we have become. Where else could it end? **He is bruised for our iniquity.** And not just once, by the way. The paschal mystery is not God saying to the world, **"been there, done that."** He is bruised over and over and over...

Revelation talks about the **"Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world."** This is God's eternal heart, not a brief incarnational mission...It's more like... here's who I am...always.

God's heart is always out there, because it's always loving and it's always invested. God's always, "in." God is always longing for us... vulnerable to us... wanting so to bring us in under the shelter of his wings.

And every time we run off in anxiety... living life in anxiety and chaos and blind brokenness... God is wounded.

In every time we wound our fellow chicks and refuse to be part of the brood. God is wounded.

Every time we start acting like foxes... and grabbing for position and power and using foxy ways, in the name of holy causes, God is wounded.

God is wounded. **"You weren't willing."**

We must become willing... this is our vocation... our calling to be who we are and to be where we belong. And yes... that means we're vulnerable too. ... To the fox and to the world... And we are going to be hurt because of it.

There's a reason Jesus told his disciples that he was going to send them out as **"lambs among wolves."** He didn't candy coat the situation did he? Being who we are is going to make us vulnerable to all that the world is.

And... who wants to be vulnerable. Down at the office... over at the university... in a family that is struggling. Who wants to put themselves on the line... again and again... out there... over there.

We wouldn't naturally do that... now would we? Love calls us to be powerless and we say, **"Um... I'm thinking it would be easier and faster and more effective if I created a political action group... or at the very least, go to some chat room and blast the opposition."**

It's our calling to be willing... to stand vulnerably with Jesus, but... **"Withholding the blessing in some relationship makes me feel better... hanging onto my bitterness is easier... fighting for my rights or my cause is much more exhilarating."**

We chicks don't go there easily.

But... Jesus knows something about saving a world... and about where real power lies and from what kind of heart it can flow into the world.

This is the way of the cross...

it is the way of salvation...

it is the way of love.

And we're invited to be right there. "To share the fate of God for the life of the world."

(Richard Rohr, Everything Belongs)

Choose That!