

A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church
“Let’s Make a Deal”
By Wes Eades
2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a; Psalm 51:1-12; John 6:24-35
August 2, 2009

This will be a sermon in eight acts (don't worry, some of the acts are very, very brief).

Please pray with me . . .

Act One

Over the past few months I've discovered, and become addicted to, TV series on the computer. I have no patience for watching these silly story lines develop week by week, but when I realized I could move through a year of episodes in a weekend . . . well . . . It started with *Dexter*, and moved to *Friday Night Lights*. I then discovered *Heroes*, and the latest has been *Lost*. *Lost* is about the survivors of a plane crash who find themselves on a mysterious island where all sorts of odd things unfold.

Jenn and Scott Rushing lent me the first three seasons of *Lost*, and I've scrambled around on the Internet finding sites where I could watch the rest because I'm too cheap to buy or rent them. Jenn unwittingly set the context for my viewing when she made the simple comment, “Every character is looking for redemption.” This is indeed a central theme of the series, and Jenn's comment allowed me to have my eyes open to it from the start rather than having to discover it along the way.

I haven't tried to figure out who the psychological and theological consultants for the show are, but they are getting some good advice on how to portray the human spirit. We'll do anything to survive, but once we've figured out how to survive, we're left with all the shame and wreckage of what we had to do to survive. And if we don't make peace with that shame and wreckage, we won't be able to, well, survive.

Because the writers of *Lost* have so clearly understood this, a sub-theme of the show is “*Let's make a deal.*” Sometimes it's deal making to get critical supplies from the show's opportunist who has collected everything of importance and then set up shop. But as the series progresses the deal making becomes about life and death and the possibility of rescue. You are stuck with the anxiety of realizing that some of the deals are purely manipulations. You can never decide that any of characters can be completely trusted to keep their word. Every one on the show just wants to be rescued.

As corny as this sounds, “Ain't that just like life?”

Few of us in this room have ever been up against actual physical survival—though some certainly have been. What most of us have faced is emotional and spiritual survival. Sometimes we're trying to survive what's been done to us, and sometimes it's about what we've done to ourselves. Sometimes it's about what we have done to others. For most of us it's a combination of all three. All three paths hopefully lead us to an important awareness: I need to be rescued. Or, to frame it theologically, *I need redemption.*

Act Two

I grew up in an era where the words “Go to your room and wait for your Father to come home” introduced me to my need for redemption. The bigger you get, the bigger the mistakes you make. Anyone here ever found

themselves, as a teenager, driving home with a fresh traffic ticket for going 60 in a 30? All you were doing was racing your buddy on the road that runs behind the elementary school. You've got to explain this to your parents, and you know you need redemption. Anyone here ever get a call from your parents that begins with, "We just got off the phone with the dean of academic affairs. . . ." You know you need redemption. Perhaps someone in this room has come home to a spouse who says, "Honey, you left your email up on the screen when you left, and we need to talk about this. . . ." Redemption, anyone?

It's not always what you've done. Sometimes it's what's done to you. Some of you here have heard me talk about what it was like to get a call from an IRS agent who asked, "Dr. Eades, can you explain why your agency has not made pay-roll tax payments for the last year?" That question was my introduction to what an office manager had done to me, and I knew I needed redemption.

If we were to focus on relationships, you know how serious this whole redemption thing becomes. So many of you here know what it's like to break the promises you've made to the most important people in your life. So many of you know what it's like to be the recipient of those broken promises. It doesn't matter which side you are on in that crisis, you know you need redemption.

Act Three

At that moment, when the need for redemption hits you, you will have to make some hard choices. The choices you make, in that critical moment, will shape your life.

You can choose to send the general to the front lines where he will most certainly be killed.

You can choose to tell everyone you are going to hike the Appalachian trail.

You can choose to build a private amusement park for children, or get a billion dollars worth of plastic surgery in the hopes that changing externals will somehow change the soul.

You get to choose.

And how you choose will shape your life.

You get to choose whether it will be honesty or a cover-up.

You get to choose whether it will be forgiveness or revenge.

You get to choose whether it will be excuses or responsibility.

You get to choose whether it will be engagement or avoidance.

You get to choose whether or not to play "Let's make a Deal."

We all think we want choices . . . when it's about mint chocolate chip or butter brickle. But when it comes to those moments that will truly shape your life . . . Are you willing to choose?

By the way, it seems to me that things go smoother if one makes the hard choices BEFORE Nathan shows up. . . .

Act Four

Do you remember the time when you viewed people like David, or politicians, or entertainers with a certain amount of disgust? How could they be so stupid? How could they be so shallow? How could they be so selfish?

Has Nathan come to visit you yet? Have you had that moment when it dawned on you that you were more like them than you wanted to admit? Do you remember when Psalm 51:10 became your prayer? "Create a clean

heart in me O Lord, and renew a right spirit within me.” Have you ever been in a corner where that prayer was an anguished cry? Do you remember wondering if you really meant it when you prayed it? Or were you trying to play “Let's make a deal.”

"God, get me outta this one and I'll never . . . well, probably never . . . well, maybe never . . . “

Act Five

Jesus knows human nature. When the crowds follow Him, He says, "Oh come on. You're not here because you want redemption. You're here because you heard about that loaves and fishes thing, and now you want to play ‘Let's make a deal.’”

If you grew up like me, then you grew up with a steady message of “Jesus will redeem you.” But I'm here to tell you, in all the broken things I've done and that have been done to me, there's not been a single time that Jesus came to me and said, “You just relax, son, I'll fix this for you.” Whatever it means to say that “Jesus saves,” it clearly doesn't mean that Jesus gets you off the hook. Jesus doesn't play “Let's make a deal.” I wish He did, but He doesn't.

Have you tried to play “Let's make a deal” with Jesus? If you say you haven't, I'll think you're a liar. Please, accept my apology ahead of time, because maybe you really never have tried to play “Let's make a deal” with Jesus. I'm just saying that if you tell me you never have, I'll think you're a liar (unless you're Katy Stokes).

Act Six

So, you've got the World on one side saying, “Let's make a deal, and maybe we can get you out of this one.” And you've got Jesus on the other hand saying, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty.” My own life is a testimony to how hard it is to actually trust Jesus, but this is what our shared tradition asks us to trust.

Wouldn't it give Jesus a little extra leverage if He could guarantee that Nathan would indeed show up to give you the ol' comeuppance? You know, the “your sins will always find you out” deal, but that's just not the case.

Most of you remember Charles Kurault, the beloved anchor of CBS Sunday morning. He was one of the most trustworthy figures on national TV. He drew millions to his television program. He was so good-natured . . . so inviting . . . so trustworthy. Everyone was rather shocked to learn, upon his death, that he had a second, secret family with a woman in Montana. It sure doesn't seem like he ever got the Nathan treatment. Shoot, he pulled off the charade right up until they put him in the ground.

So, the truth is, you might just get away with “Let's make a deal.” We only hear about the folks who, like the congressman, get caught.

Besides, if Jesus were into using leverage, wouldn't He just be playing “Let's Make a Deal?”

Act Seven

What's the hardest choice you face right now? Which road likely leads toward redemption? Which road would be your version of “Let's Make a Deal?”

What's the hardest choice you face right now?

Act Eight

Would you sing with me?

*Amazing grace how sweet the sound.
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now I'm found.
Was blind, but now I see.*

Amen.

For Reflection

*We must make the choices that enable us to fulfill the deepest capacities
of our real selves.*

- Thomas Merton

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out
my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my
transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.*

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

– Psalm 51: 1, 2, 3, 10, 12

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