

# A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

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## “The Gathering of the Willing”

Luke 13: 31-35

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When you read Luke’s gospel, as we do in this year and in this Lenten season, sometimes we’re left scratching our heads looking for a theme... which is especially true in chapter 13.

We go from being told to “repent or else,”  
to a parable about a fig-loving winemaker,  
then Jesus’ is in hot water for healing on the Sabbath...  
AGAIN.

Then it’s a narrow door and the door is going to shut, so pay attention.  
Then there’s conversation about who’s in and who’s out.  
There’s a prophetic word about weeping and gnashing of teeth.  
Then it’s the last being first and the first being last.  
The narrative doesn’t have one theme.

And it’s like that ever since Jesus “**set his face towards Jerusalem**” at the end of chapter nine. Luke is all over the place... and maybe that’s just how it goes in the “way of Jesus” and those who follow.

Luke reports to us that “**Jesus went through the towns and villages teaching as he makes HIS WAY to Jerusalem,**”. Jesus makes his way... and he’s finally there... in Jerusalem. Which is where the Pharisee’s showed up to give Jesus a warning. “**FYI, Jesus. Herod wants to kill you... you better get the heck out of town.**”

It’s hard to tell what their motivation is. Usually, the Pharisees aren’t trying to help Jesus.

They’re not glad to see him...  
or wanting to hear him...  
unless maybe it’s to catch him in some heresy.

And what’re they doing hanging around with Herod any way. That “Pawn of Rome” that “Want-to-be-a-big-man”. “**Jesus, we have intel... the “down-low”... Herod’s after you.**”

Maybe they just don’t won’t to put up with all the crowds and questions and the sabbath violations and Jesus making them look bad. “**You need to get out of here... really. Herod is coming.**”

And like Jesus often did in the first century, he responds with barnyard metaphor. “**Herod???? That fox???**”

And Herod was. He was sleazy, conniving, deceptive, fox ... and he came by it naturally. He was a real “son of a fox.” Remember his dad trying to kill baby Jesus by slaughtering children in the area. Remember how he greeted to Wisemen, “**Aweeee, do let me know where the baby is... so I can worship him too.**”

The Herod referenced in chapter 13 did not fall far from the fig tree. Remember, this “Son of a Fox” had John the Baptist beheaded. This predator even killed his own family members (we know from non-biblical sources) to keep his throne secure.

**HEROD!**

**“Tell that fox I’m going to keep doing what I do...  
driving out what is evil  
and healing what is broken  
finishing what I’m here to finish.**

His face is fixed!!!!

The way, HIS WAY, is set.

It is who he is... because it’s who God is.

Albert Schweizer said, reflecting on these words, *“This.. is Jesus’ great freedom, that all he does and its appointed end... belong to God.”*

**“Herod??? That fox??? He isn’t really in control of anything.”**

And then... I imagine you can see Jesus’ countenance change. There’s a deep, tired breath before he laments... **“Jerusalem, Jerusalem.... You kill the prophets and stone those sent to you.”**

Luke writes and tells the Gospel Story with an eye towards the prophetic and that tradition... it’s Spirit rather than the Law with Luke. And his “Gospel Backdrop is Jerusalem.” He references Jerusalem 82 times in his gospel and in the Book of Acts. Way more than any other writer. 82 times (btw, I got that data from the scholar, “**Goo Gell...**” Um... he’s a modern French theologian “**AI Goo Gell.**”)

**Jerusalem? Mentioned 82 times?** It’s not just a city or home base for a nation or a place to worship. It’s where prophets go to die... it’s where God goes to die. **“Jerusalem, Jerusalem.”**

Which leads us to barnyard metaphor. **“Sooooooo many times, I’ve wanted to gather you in like a mother hen would her chicks... secure under her wings.”**

Imagine again... hear the LONGING in his voice... and feel the lump in his throat. **“I’ve always wanted to gather you.”**

It’s not hard for us to get there emotionally. We know this pain... ALL WHO LOVE... LONG! THEY LONG FOR WHAT THEY HOPE and FOR WHOM THEY ARE HOPFULL.

He wanted them to be gathered... with him... and with one another... and also within themselves. Their lives were scattered... because lives have a way of becoming scattered... rather than being centered... rather than being purposed. Rather than being present to God... and held and sheltered by God.

Jesus longed for them to be gathered, but... they weren’t willing.

Why weren’t they willing?

They got anxious or impatient maybe.

They got angry or mislead along the way.

They got hungry for who knows what...  
more of this or that.

It was forbidden fruit in the garden.

It was a tower in Babel, made to raise them high as God.  
 It was a golden calve that “surely would save them in the desert.  
 It was a King, a Kingdom, a Temple.  
 Some laws. Some more laws. Some more laws.  
 More certainty and less mystery... so we can know we’re right.

Why are human beings, why are we, not willing to be gathered... maybe there’s another fox around who stirs things up.

**Give us Barabbas!!!!!!** *“Who is he?”*

*“I don’t know! I just want to throw this rock at somebody.”*

Give us the “WEGO”... not just an ego but a “WEGO.”

The tribe with its answers and power and reputation.

Throwing rocks with the mob... feels like a better deal than hiding under hen’s shelter. Just identify a few enemies to hate... and name them as the problem. *A hen’s brooding... really????? Are you kidding.*

**“I wanted to gather but you weren’t willing.”**

There it is... there’s this **will** involved. And all creation flows from that loving eternal truth, **that what is truly loving cannot be coercing.**

Love can’t ultimately demand and command what it loves. There is always a I and there is always a Thou. And love must always create a space for that to be true.

There’s got to be room for a will. So, God, infinite God... from love, through love, because of love, creates a being who would be free. What a risk... What a divine roll of the dice. But that’s what love demands.

As one scholar put it, **God... Limitless God... limits God’s self, 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 control and conformity aren’t the eternal longing.

It’s relationship!!! Isn’t it. It’s you.

It’s becoming!!! Isn’t it.

Becoming truly free that we might love.

Becoming Christ-like.

And so, as Maximus the Confessor put it about 15 centuries ago, **“We’re tragically free.”** And the whole thing... the whole creation... the whole barnyard... IS VULNERABLE... because God is vulnerable and chooses to stand at the door and knock (knock) loving that you... we all... might be gracefully gathered.

Real connection always involves being vulnerable, which is hard for many of us. I’m an Enneagram 9, and 9s on the Enneagram have a tendency to avoid being “effected.” Isn’t that why so many are not “willing” to be gathered. They stay unaffected.

In the cross we see most deeply, God’s nature... God’s humility... God’s vulnerability... God’s Eternal Reality is always affected. In the Cross we see God’s way. The cross is where the heart of God gets named and where the season of Lent takes us... into the middle of the Pascal Mystery. The mystery of God suffering.

It's who God is.

Its God being vulnerable to us and to all that we have become.

Where else could it end?

**But where God 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.**" The Divine is bruised over and over and over!

Revelation names it the "**Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world.**" From the very beginning. This is God's eternal reality. Not a brief incarnational mission... It's not, "**operation save humanity.**" It's God gathering us from the beginning.

The Divine is always exposed... always vulnerable to all creation ... wanting so to bring us in under the divine shelter.

And every time we run off in anxiety with all the chaos... needing more, not trusting, not awake, oblivious our blindness, stoning rocks in hand... Every time... the Holy One is wounded.

And every time we wound our fellow chicks and refuse to be part of the God's brooding; the world is wounded.

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

God is wounded when, "**when we aren't willing.**"

To 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 going to be vulnerable too. ... To the foxes and to their 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 sugar coat the situation, did he? Being who we are as followers of Jesus makes us vulnerable to all that the world is.

Being vulnerable... and living humbly... suffering... these are group projects, you know. It's a "gathered thing" and we bear it with God for the sake of the world. If we are willing.

And we should remember, please remember that living vulnerably is not only about being wounded...

It's also about becoming

and about redemption and being made whole

... and it is about resurrection

It's about joy and belonging.

The way of Christ... the way of God??? It's where the restoration of all things begins... right there in the willing heart of God.

Let's be willing too.