

## **“Faithful...Today, Tomorrow, and the Next Day”**

### **Luke 13:31-35**

As a young boy I dearly loved going with my family to visit Grandpa and Grandma Moffitt. Living on an old farm outside of Braddyville, Iowa, affectionately called “the old home place,” my mother’s parents and her five siblings had literally made a life for themselves off the good earth. They had far more love than money—no running water, no indoor plumbing—so visiting was an adventure to say the least. But we loved it. A chance to explore God’s amazing creation with all the wonder that a farm had to offer.

One of my favorite opportunities when visiting the farm was gathering the eggs. There was just something so productive about carefully retrieving these jewels that would become a part of most meals somehow. On a rare occasion, gathering eggs was not so much fun—for example, if a black snake had crawled into a nest to eat the eggs. But even worst than that, I think, was the challenge of a feisty, determined setting hen who didn’t want to give up the goods.

I’d seen Grandma just reach in there and pull the hen out to get the eggs she was protecting, but I just knew I’d get pecked something fierce, so I’d resort to throwing corn cobs or going after a stick to scare her off her perch. More than once, I had to tell Grandma that I got all the eggs but from one nest. Grandpa was kind of hoot and kid me about an old hen getting the better of me. It’s a wonder I didn’t have nightmares about killer chickens.

It’s a wonder Jesus didn’t have nightmares about Herod. The Pharisees, not generally known to be supporters of Jesus, warned him that Herod wanted to kill him. Whether they wanted him out of their way or were sincere, we can’t tell for sure; but there’s little doubt about Herod’s intent. He had already killed John the Baptist. When you are trying to maintain political stability and security, the last thing you want is popular movements critical of the government. People like John and Jesus brought unrest.

In response to the Pharisees encouragement to get out of town, Jesus tells them to inform that fox Herod, “Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.” Jesus is saying in effect that his timetable is not determined by Herod’s schemes but by divine purpose.

Later, when Herod meets Jesus and questions him before his crucifixion, Jesus refuses to accommodate him in any way. In the wilderness Jesus had already faced the temptation to worship another as a way of gaining the kingdoms of this world, and his answer was a firm “no.” He was resolutely committed to the worship of God and following God’s purpose for his life. With Herod he carries out that commitment. What was there to say to one who had beheaded his cousin and prophet John?

What we are talking about is *living vertically in a horizontal world—especially when life gives you mixed messages*. Have you ever noticed how all kinds of people have great ideas for your life? You find yourself in the midst of personal anguish and it seems as though everybody in your life has an option. Many well-meaning folk even have others who have an idea for you! “My Aunt Mary went through exactly what you are going through and she...”

Then there are the “experts” in your life who have *the* answer for you. And perhaps most distressing are the “*Woulda, shoulda, coulda*” people who somehow enjoy picking at other people’s wounds. It’s at such times we need what Jesus demonstrated—a strong sense of inner direction. “Herod wants to kill you!” “I’ve got work to do.” His direction came from the inner work of the Spirit of God. Sometimes the scriptures call it *the still small voice*.

No matter how hectic and troubled outer circumstances may be, we gain strength when we take time to develop our inner lives. Duties press upon us. Schedules conspire against us from paying attention to what’s inside. If you track Jesus’ steps through the gospels, you will find him regularly taking time out for contact with God. When times of crisis come and we need to call on our inner resources, what we have developed will be what is available.

Even though Herod was after him, Jesus was absolutely clear about the driving force of his life. Everywhere Jesus went he brought evidence of God’s love. The driving force of Jesus’ life was that God should be in charge at all times and in every place. Whether Herod or anybody else was after his life, Jesus was at peace within because where God is in charge, things are going to work according to God’s will.

When I am clear about the love of God for me and my love for God, I am secure. God is *in fact* (not just in principle) the driving force of my life. However, I simply am not able to live in that mode all the time.

Try this exercise in your quiet time. Ask yourself, “What is the driving force of my life?” Don’t prejudge or even think too much about what emerges in your mind. Simply let it come and write it down. If the driving force is something you wouldn’t want to tell anyone else, that’s okay. You don’t have to turn your sheet in to anybody. When you get the driving force of your life, what is the second most powerful force in your life? And third...keep going until there are no more answers.

When you have exhausted the list, ask, “What do I wish was the driving force in my life?” Keep the two lists in mind and simply keep it in your heart during your times of daily conscious contact with God. Trust me, it can make an impact.

One incredible thing about our Lord was his ability to stay focused upon the mission that was his no matter what was happening around him. The driving force and goal of his life was to bring the Kingdom of God to everyone around him. And the greatest characteristic of that Kingdom was an amazing, mind-boggling, unconditional love. The love of God made so clear in the life and message of Jesus is a love that persists in spite of rejection. It is still there after being scoffed at and killed. The ultimate crisis of Jesus’ life, his agonizing death on a cross, could not destroy his love, his ultimate goal.

And this would happen in Jerusalem where many prophets had been killed over the centuries. Our Lord cried over the city which has scorned God’s blessing and taken offense at God’s mercy. It’s hard to avoid the conclusion that Luke loved Jerusalem. He mentions Jerusalem 90 times in his gospel, while all the other New Testament writers combined mention it only 49 times. Nothing that happens in Jerusalem is insignificant. Barbara Brown Taylor writes: “When Jerusalem obeys God, the world spins peacefully on its axis. When Jerusalem ignores God, the whole planet wobbles.”

God and God’s prophets have been like a compassionate mother hen gathering her brood under her wings. Given the number of animals available, it is interesting that Jesus choose a hen. He might have picked the eagle of Exodus, the stealthy leopard of Hosea, or the proud lion of Judah, but a mother hen doesn’t inspire much confidence. No wonder some of the chicks have decided to go with the fox. It’s pretty typical of Jesus. He was always turning things upside down, so that children and peasants wind up on top while kings and scholars land on the bottom. He was always playing havoc with our expectations about how things

should be paying the last first. So naturally, he chooses a chicken, which is about as defenseless against a fox as you can get.

What would you say is your single most important goal in all of life? When all is said and done, when you have done your best and lived your life, what will be the goal for which you lived? Crisis will come and go. Hard times will mark your journey. Sometimes devastating experiences will press hard on your soul. But when life's Director calls out, "It's a wrap" what will be that bottom line goal of life you have sought to achieve?

Can there be any greater goal in life than to do this one thing...to bring the amazing unconditional love of God to someone else? This goal can revolutionize your life. It will build your inner life and when times of trial come, it will provide a solid place within. And when you have solid ground within, the outer voices that seek to direct your life will diminish.

I guess this text ultimately poses the question for us: "In what kind of God do we believe?" There are those whose answer to that question has led them to privilege, exclusion, and cruelty. I sense more and more that we are a faith community whose God calls us to kindness, to justice and inclusion. With such a God we can journey today, tomorrow and the next day without fear, knowing that such a gracious God will never fail us or forsake us.

Jesus won't be the king of the jungle in this or any other story. What he will be is a mother hen, who stands between the chicks and those who mean to do them harm. She has no fangs, no claws. All she has is her willingness to shield her babies with her own body. If the fox wants them, he will have to kill her first.

Which is what happened? If you have ever loved someone you could not protect, then you understand the depth of Jesus' lament. All you can do is open your arms. You cannot make anyone walk into them. Meanwhile, this is the most vulnerable posture in the world—wings spread, breast exposed—but if you mean what you say, then this is how you stand.