

Why We Resist **Pastor Morgan Murray** **West Valley Presbyterian Church**

Luke 13:31-35 NRSV

31 At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” 32 He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. 33 Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ 34 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 35 See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’ ”

Over the course of the last few chapters, Jesus has turned his face toward Jerusalem and what awaits him there. As he travels, he is teaching and healing along the way and his reputation is starting to spread. Big crowds start following him. He’s drawing a lot of attention. Some wellintentioned Pharisees see the risk he’s running. If he’s not careful, Herod will kill Jesus just as he killed John. Jesus calls Herod a fox to set up the image he about to share with them. Just as God’s care for Israel is depicted in the Psalms as a bird protecting chicks under its wings, Jesus says: “Jerusalem, I wanted to do that for you too. I wanted to gather you like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. But foxes kill hens. I am headed to Jerusalem to die, and Herod has very little to do with it. The path I’m on is well worn by God’s prophets, John just being the latest and the greatest of them.”

What Jesus wants is to gather God’s people under his loving care and protection and keep them safe. But while Jesus has been met with curiosity, excitement, and desire on his journey, he has also encountered a lot of resistance. People say they want God’s best for themselves, but when Jesus is standing right in front of them, they say “no thanks I’ll pass.”

Can you picture this scene? Can you hear the grief in Jesus’ voice? The desperation?

Have you ever offered help to someone and felt the grief Jesus felt in that moment?

Possible examples:

- Despite all your words of encouragement, your friend still beats themselves up and tears themselves down.
- Begging someone to check themselves into rehab.

Did you find yourself struggling to understand why they resisted? But then I need to ask: How do YOU resist God’s love? WHY do you do it?

Our Lenten series is inspired by the modern hymn “How Deep the Father’s Love for Us” by Stuart Townsend:

*How deep the Father's love for us
How vast beyond all measure
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure*

We know the Father's love for us is vast. We know (up here in our heads) that we are God's treasures. And yet, we still resist the truth of these things.

Core

God wants us to find a home in God's love. As much as we claim to want it, we resist it.

When we think about resisting God's love, it can be helpful to think about what it looks like, how we do it, and why we do it. Resistance has a posture, a strategy, and (at least one) motive.

Resistance has a posture.

Even if we don't do it outwardly, each of us has a posture we take in resistance:

- Arms in front, pushing hard against.
- Turning our backs to it, refusing to even look
- Arms folded in angry defiance
- Going totally rigid, not allowing ourselves
- Going totally limp, as we are so much dead weight
- Curling up in a ball, putting up our fists...
- Something else... what is yours?

Again, we may do this outwardly but this may be your inward posture. Ask someone who knows you well to help you. I promise you: They've seen it!

Resistance has a strategy.

How do we resist it? Maybe we...

- Stay busy – filling our hours with distractions outside of us to avoid the stuff happening inside of us.
- Stay in our heads – thinking, worrying, planning, perseverating
- Stay stuck in our habits – routines that keep us numb

Resistance has a motive.

There's always a reason, and maybe there's even more than one.

- Maybe we've been disappointed in the past. God didn't answer my prayers back then, so I don't want to trust God now.
- Maybe we believe we don't deserve it. We believe ourselves to be unlovable, unworthy of God's care and protection.
- Maybe we are holding onto something else that we don't want to let go of, because it even though it is painful it is still familiar and we'd rather stay with what we know and be miserable than be open to something totally new and unfamiliar. It can be scary.

- Maybe we've bought into some of the lies and temptations the devil puts before us. We have tried to be competent enough, powerful enough, spectacular enough and we are failing at it so we blame ourselves and vascillate between trying harder and giving up. Which is exactly what the devil wants... anything but turning to the Father and relying on God's love to be enough.
- Maybe it's trauma. When trauma comes into our lives at a certain age, there is a part of us that stays that age until the trauma can be addressed and healed.
- Very possibly, it is some combination of these.

We say that we want God's best for our lives. We pray for it. We ask others to pray for us to have it. But when it comes to us requiring nothing more and nothing less than our surrender, we dig in our heels. It say, "Yes Lord your Kingdom come!" right up until we realize that means I have to let my kingdom go. I gotta give something up – a behavior or an attitude or a grudge or a wound.

What I want you to hold in your mind and heart this morning is Jesus. Jesus standing with his arms outstretched, as if pleading, full of heartbreak and compassion mixed with total resolve. Jesus wants to draw you in, but you gotta allow it. Jesus doesn't force himself on the world, but he does give himself – totally and utterly. Jesus reveals the total and utter love of the Father to us.

I want us to get in touch with the compassion that moves Jesus. That is the compassion we need to have for ourselves when we resist. It's the compassion we need for others. It's from that place of compassion – not out of guilt or shame – that we can begin to open up and receive what we have been resisting for so long.

We've heard the expression, "resistance is futile." When it comes to God's love, resistance isn't futile. We can successfully resist God's love. It isn't futile, but it is painful. Jesus says, "Look, your house is left to you desolate" (Luke 13:35). What does he mean by that? Commentators think he's talking about the Temple in Jerusalem and it's eventual destruction. But I think of how we can remain desolate in our alone-ness when we resist God's love. It's an awful picture.

Let's start to change that.

Call: A Prayer Exercise

In prayer this week, think of someone who resisted your efforts to help them, to love, to care for them. Imagine them standing before God. Imagine their posture. Now imagine yourself standing beside them, also standing before God. Be aware of your posture. Be aware of how each of you, in your own way, resists God's love and care. Try to be aware of this without making judgements about it.

During this prayer time, stand with arms outstretched as you imagine Jesus was doing when he described gathering the people together as a hen gathers her brood to protect them.

Imagine Jesus standing over you this way. What does it feel like? Imagine Jesus standing over someone else you know and love who is resisting God's love. How does it change how you feel about Jesus? How you feel about the other person?

Let me pray for you as you reflect on your own resistance, and how you will change that this week.