

Sunday Sermon

2/4/24

Series: Little Foxes

Passage: Song of Solomon 5:2-7

Title: The Little Fox of the Past

Good morning, Church! If you have your bibles, go ahead and open to Song of Solomon chapter 5, but before we jump into God's Word, I want to tell you about a dream that Becky had a while back.

In the dream, she was passionate about something, and she wanted to communicate her passion to me in a way that I would understand. She was trying to get me to, not only share her passion, but also her point of view. So she begins to tell me. The problem was that no matter what she told me, or how well she tried to communicate, I just wasn't getting it. Apparently, I was too dense or dumb to figure it out. So she'd tell me again, and I would miss it again.

And you know how it goes, at that point she started getting frustrated. "What are you, new? How are you not understanding this?" Well, I'm not gonna take that, so I retort, "I might, if you were making a shred of rational sense!" So it escalates and she starts getting angry, and because of that, I start being a total jerk. So she starts yelling. So I respond maturely by walking away, and not listening, and treating her like garbage.

And it went on like this. Her emotions were cranked to 11. She was absorbing feelings of hurt, rejection, amazement about the kind of person that I apparently was, that I would ever act that way toward her! Now, remember, this was a DREAM! It didn't actually happen!

And in reality, here I am over on my side of the bed, sawing logs, completely oblivious to the intense emotional damage that I'm causing my wife in that moment. Completely unaware of the reckoning that was looming come the dawn.

Now if you've experienced this martial phenomenon, you also know that, when the dream ends and conscientiousness returns to the dreamer, often times the emotional turmoil of the dream remains. I assure you, I did not wake up that morning with my account at zero. I had already lost. The day started with Becky angry at me, and with us in the conflict funk.

Now all that said, it was not a big deal. Becky was very honest and communicative. She knew that it was just a dream, that I was not actually at fault for anything. But let me tell you, the emotional turmoil remained, and it took a while for her deal with it, to work through it, to get over it. And during that time, it effected our relationship because, real or imagined, I had hurt her.

**Listen: If that was the effect of something that didn't actually happen, what happens when that hurt isn't a dream but a reality?**

***"Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyard."***

**Discord. Dishonor. Neglect. Transaction.** Little foxes that, if allowed to roam, bring devastation to our relationships.

Beloved, God tells us to catch and kill the foxes.

This morning, we will end our series talking about **our final little fox: the little fox of the past.**

But before we jump in, we need to pray. Will you pray with me? **[Pray]**

In Isaiah 43:18-19 the Lord says, ***“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the desert.”***

When it comes to this issue of the little fox of the past, it is important to recognize that we are viewing the past through the lens of Isaiah 43. The truth is that the past is not all bad. **We have fond memories** from the past – precious time with family/friends. It can be beneficial. **We learn from past** experiences both positive and negative. There are even some contexts in scripture where **God tells us to remember the past** – especially as it pertains to his work and who he has shown himself to be, so that when we come across something in the future, we know who he is.

But the past as it pertains to Is. 43 is different. In the context of Is. 43, God is telling his people that he wants to bring them somewhere. You see, **Is. 43 is all about God’s plan to redeem and to save, to bring his life and real change into our reality and into our relationships.** He can do that.

But in that he warns, ***“Don’t dwell on the past.”*** Why? He says, “Because I want to do something new.”

That word “dwell” means ***“to give attention to or be marked by.”***

Listen: the past is a little fox when it causes us to get stuck on something, or marked by something, which then prevents the Lord from bringing his renewing work into our life or into that relationship.

And if we are either unwilling or unable to overcome the past, the little fox is allowed to roam. Now that said, there are **two facets** of this little fox that God wants to give understanding to this morning: **one is outward/others focused, the other is inward/identity focused.**

And so we are going to unpack those together this morning, and this is where our passage in SoS intersects with this concept. We’ll be looking at **SoS 5:2-7.**

I started the message today with Becky’s dream because our passage in SoS 5 is a dream sequence as well.

As verse 2 begins, the woman is dreaming about a late-night rendezvous with her beloved. The man is heard knocking at the door. He wants to enter. The woman wants him to enter. There’s desire and longing, anticipation and high expectation. There’s playfulness and the expectancy of pleasure and fulfillment, of intimate connection. I think the Black-Eyed Peas

said it well in 2009, *“I got a feeling that tonight’s gonna be a good, good night.”* That’s how the dream begins.

But here the narrative takes a dramatic turn. The woman gets up to let her beloved in, wholly open and vulnerable to him. But when she opens the door, she finds that (v.6) he **“had turned and gone.”**

Now if you remember week 1 and the little fox of discord, we read in chapter 6:1 that the beloved had turned away (“pa-na”), and the lesson there was that sometimes the little fox of discord roams because in times of conflict - “pa-na” - we look away and turn to other things instead of resolving the issue with the person.

**This turning is different.** It’s the word **“khaw-mak.”** It means **“to withdraw.”** Further, that word “gone” in verse 6 is the word **“abar”** meaning **“to pass over, to alienate – in some cases: to transgress/to sin against.”**

The picture being painted here is that, in a context of great expectation and intimate connection and openness and vulnerability, the woman’s beloved intentionally made the choice to withdraw himself/his love from the woman, to alienate her – to alienate the relationship. Say, “Ouch!” I think most of us though, on some level, can relate to this: feelings of rejection, betrayal, devaluing – and it wounds.

And so crushing the weight of this blow that she says, **“My heart/my soul** (lit. “that which breathes in me”) **“yasa” – left, went out.”** “I died inside.” This woman’s heart was crushed by her beloved’s wounding. Cut by deep, deep offense. Now remember, this was a dream, but I also know that some of us connect with this all too well.

**And in the scope of things, it’s easy to “get over” the ridiculous dream and laugh about it tomorrow, but that doesn’t happen so easy when it’s real life - when it’s real hurt.**

And many times, the more intimate the relationship, the deeper the wounding, and the more difficult it is for us to forgive.

And often we then find ourselves marked by/carrying that hurt. Holding onto feelings of anger, bitterness, vengeance toward the other person. Beloved, that’s a fox. It’s a fox because it holds you and that relationship in bondage, and that’s not God’s heart. His desire is to deliver us out of bondage. He says, “Don’t keep your life there, I want to do something new. I want to make a way forward, but the way forward is forgiveness.”

God says in Col. 3:13, **“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”**

**Beloved, the little fox of the past is allowed to roam when we hold onto unforgiveness against the one who has hurt/wronged us.**

That’s the first facet of this little fox of the past, but there is a second facet we must understand as well. You see, from there the woman’s dream continues, and she goes out looking for her beloved. But while she’s out there the unthinkable happens. The watchmen find her. These are men who are supposed to defend and protect. Instead, they bruise and abuse her, and in verse 7, she says, **“they took away my veil.”**

They uncovered me. Last week, we talked about the symbolism of the apple tree as a place of security and trust. ***“As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow (his covering), and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to his banqueting table, and his banner over me (his covering) was love.” – SoS 2:3-4***

Those verses in chapter 2 stand in stark contrast to this verse in chapter 5. That banner spread over her was removed. ***“They took away my veil.”*** This is an identity statement. “I’m tainted goods.” Now she was not whole but broken. Now she was not pure but stained, tarnished. She felt less than, walked on, beaten down. And maybe someone in this room feels that way this morning – you feel that, because of your past, you’re unworthy, you’re unlovable, you’re not valuable.

***Listen: sometimes we allow the fox of the past to roam because we carry on us a scarlet letter.*** Whether others put it there or we put it there, we wear it believing that it is an irreparable part of who we are.

Beloved, hear God’s truth this morning, that is not true. We have a Beloved. We have a Redeemer, and his name is Jesus Christ. In him the words of Is. 61 are made true, ***“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me, because the Lord has appointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion – to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.”***

Beloved, God wants to redeem you to new life. He wants to redeem your identity and bring streams into your desert. I love Phil 3:13-14 where Paul says, ***“Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on for the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”***

You say, “Great. How does that happen? How do I catch and kill the little fox of the past?” Only by understanding God’s love and forgiveness. What we studied today was a dream, but this woman’s reality was that she was secure in the loving presence of her beloved. Our reality may not be a dream, but we too can find our security in the loving presence of Jesus Christ, our beloved. Give your heart to him. Let him set your identity.

The truth is, as followers of Christ, we do carry a scarlet letter. Only it’s not a capital A like it was in Hawthorne’s book, but a lower case “t.” It’s the cross, covered in the blood of Jesus.

Beloved, if you are carrying something from your past, I challenge you to **finish the story**. Yes, we have been hurt by those around us. Yes, our veil taken away, but **finish the story**. At the cross, we have been remade. **“Behold, I am doing something new.”** The old gone. The new come. The past, forgiven. The future, not forsaken. Because of the cross, those in Christ have been set as a seal upon his heart and his arm. Our names graven on his hand. We have been adopted into his family. Secured for all eternity. In the love of our Beloved, we find ourselves fully loved, fully accepted, fully valued, fully secure.

As we close this morning, I think it’s important talk about what forgiveness is. Forgiveness is an issue that is close to God’s heart. Alexander Pope once said, **“To err is human; to forgive, divine.”** True, biblical forgiveness is a God-like action.

Biblical forgiveness is not justifying someone’s behavior. It’s not simply letting time go by. It’s not just “getting over it.” It’s not denying that I was hurt. And it’s certainly not waiting for the other person to be penitent or say “I’m sorry.”

No, biblical forgiveness is about you. It is a decision, a choice, an act of the will to release the person from their debt and to cancel what they owe. You say, “Why on earth would I do that?” Answer: **Because, in Christ, that is what God has done for you.** Scripture tells us that there is no one righteous. We have been unloving. We have been offensive. We have been unfaithful, and yet he extends his forgiveness and his covering, his love, to us as a gift we do not deserve.

When we catch and kill the fox of the past, we get freedom. Forgiving others is hard enough, but the truth is sometimes the hardest person to forgive is ourselves. Let God help you with that.

Because only when we release the past can we step into something new. **Finish the story.** Will you give your heart to Jesus this morning and allow his salvation and renewal to become a reality for you?

Let’s ready our hearts for the Lord’s table.

Song of Solomon is a love story that is part of a greater love story. And understood through this lens, SoS 2:4 takes on an even deeper meaning when it says that our Beloved “invites me to his banqueting table, and his banner over me is love.”

You see, love does not force, it invites. And when Christ bids his followers to his table, it too is an invitation, borne from love, to love him in return. It was God’s love for the world that sent Christ to earth. It was Christ’s love for us that caused him to lay down his life as a sacrifice for sin. And it too is that same love that ultimately compels us to live for him.

But in that, there is the invitation. An invitation into relationship. An invitation to his table. The act of taking communion is not a ritual that merits us something with the Lord, it’s an invitation to do life with our Beloved, the bridegroom, the Savior of our souls whose banner

over us is love. And if you would do that, he bids you come. Partake from his table, and share in the celebration of the grace and forgiveness we have found in him.



# LITTLE FOXES

Song of Solomon 2:15

***“Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards...”***

**- Song of Solomon 2:15**



**LITTLE  
FOXES**



## Little Foxes:

- 1) **The Little Fox of Discord**
- 2) **The Little Fox of Dishonor**
- 3) **The Little Fox of Neglect**
- 4) **The Little Fox of Transaction**
- 5) **The Little Fox of the Past**



LITTLE  
FOXES

***“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the desert.”***

**- Is. 43:18-19**



**LITTLE  
FOXES**

***“I opened to my beloved,  
but my beloved had turned and gone.”***

- Song of Solomon 5:6a



LITTLE  
FOXES

***“I opened to my beloved,  
but my beloved had turned and gone.  
My soul failed me when he spoke.”***

**- Song of Solomon 5:6**



**LITTLE  
FOXES**

***“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”***

- Col. 3:13



LITTLE  
FOXES

## Two Facets of the Little Fox of the Past:

### 1) Holding onto unforgiveness



LITTLE  
FOXES

***“The watchman found me as they went about in  
the city; they beat me, they bruised me,  
they took away my veil,  
those watchmen of the walls.”***

**- Song of Solomon 5:7**



**LITTLE  
FOXES**

***“As an apple tree among the trees of the forest,  
so is my beloved among the young men. With  
great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit  
was sweet to my taste.  
He brought me to his banqueting table, and his  
banner over me was love.”***

**- Song of Solomon 2:3-4**



**LITTLE  
FOXES**



***“The watchman found me as they went about in  
the city; they beat me, they bruised me,  
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**- Song of Solomon 5:7**



**LITTLE  
FOXES**

## Two Facets of the Little Fox of the Past:

- 1) Holding onto unforgiveness
- 2) Carrying on us a scarlet letter



***“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me,  
because the Lord has appointed me to proclaim  
good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to  
proclaim freedom for the captives and release  
from darkness for the prisoners,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the  
day of vengeance of our God...”***



LITTLE  
FOXES

***“To comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion – to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.”***

**- Is.61:1-3**



**LITTLE  
FOXES**

***“Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on for the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”***

- Phil 3:13-14



LITTLE  
FOXES

***“Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on for the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”***

- Phil 3:13-14



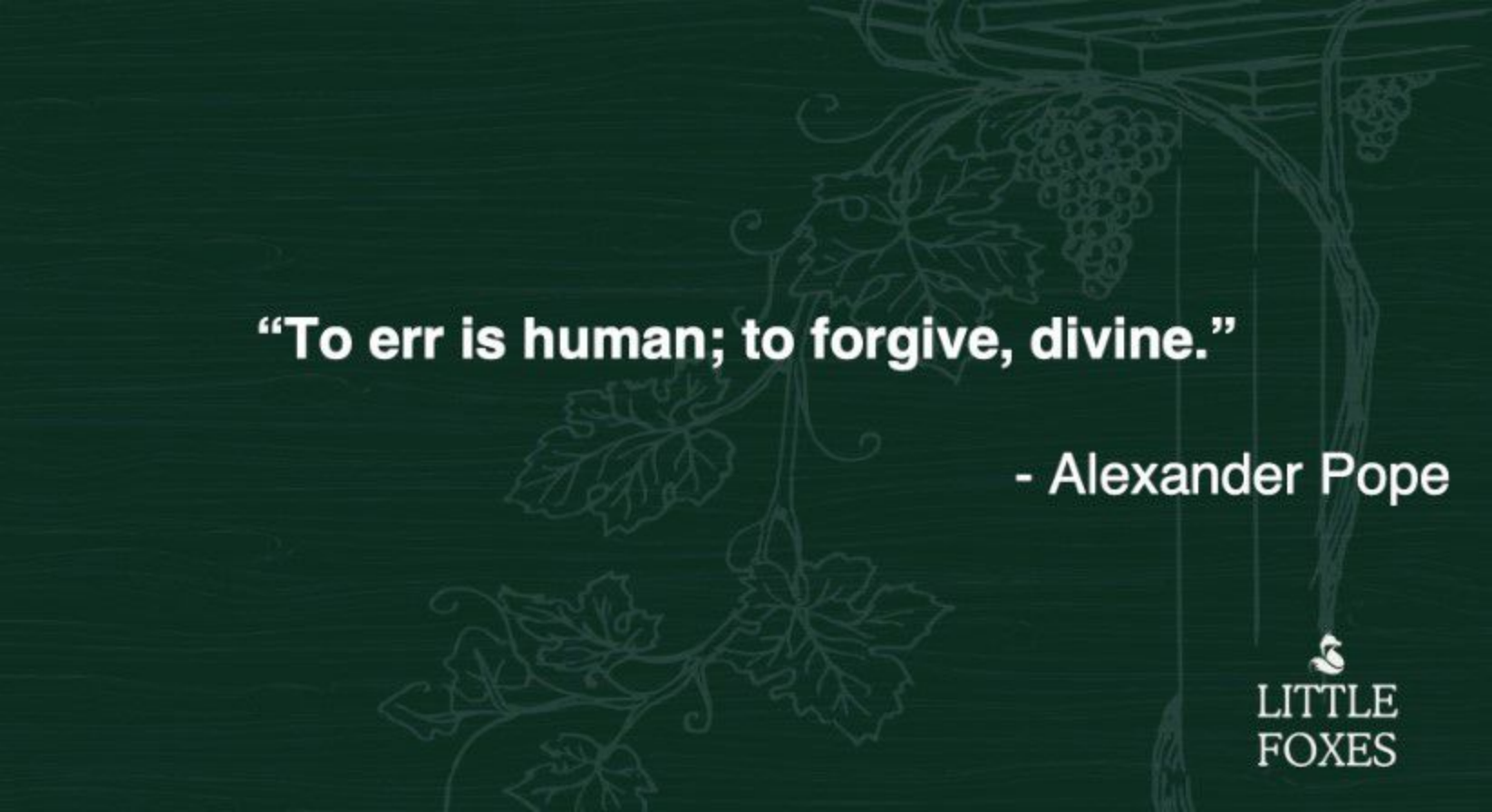
LITTLE  
FOXES

***“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the desert.”***

**- Is. 43:18-19**



**LITTLE  
FOXES**



**“To err is human; to forgive, divine.”**

**- Alexander Pope**



**LITTLE  
FOXES**