

Sunday Sermon

1/7/24

Series: Little Foxes

Passage: SoS 6:1-3

Title: A Heart of Reconciliation

Good morning church! Happy New Year! Please turn in your bibles to Song of Solomon chapter 2. Today we will be starting a new series to go along with the new year. It's a series entitled "Little Foxes." This series is a series about our relationships – from the most intimate to the casual. This series is 5 weeks. It is meant to be super practical. I wanted to do something more practical than theological in nature to start the new year.

And as I said we will be in the Song of Solomon. Now, if you know your bible you know that Song of Solomon is a book, written in poetry form, about love. Specifically, romantic love. It's a playful dance of sorts between a man and a woman who have the hots for one another, and a lover's desire for one another. It's also a book about the proper expression of that love within an exclusive, life-long, marriage relationship. If you're married here this morning, raise your hand. This series is for you.

But the principles we will be talking about in this series extend well beyond the marriage relationship. And if you are here this morning and you're not married, or you live closer than 100 miles from the nearest person, or you've ever found yourself needing to co-exist with another person in some sort of relationship – business, friendship, family or otherwise – this series is also for you. Because this series is about relationships. Specifically, what it takes to have strong and healthy relationships, and not only identifying but dealing with the little foxes that, too often, bring devastation to or even destroy our relationships.

Why is this important? Because healthy relationships are important to God. God created us to be in relationship. Relationship with him and relationship with one another. Relationships are such a huge part of our lives. The health of people, the health of marriages, and the health of the church all significantly depend on relationship. That's how God created us. What better way to start the year than to go after that?

Listen: **God wants** his people to be strong, whole, and healthy in our identity and our interactions with one another.

God wants our marriages to be strong and full of hot – happening – lump in the throat – sweaty palms – pounding heart – can't wait to get with you love. We believe that discipleship starts first and foremost in the home. And if we can't get this (marriage) relationship right what do we think we are going to be discipling our kids toward?

God wants his church to be united, without division, and *for* one another.

Jesus prays for his people, "***That they may all be one,***" (John 17:21) as the Father, Son, and Spirit are one.

Paul exhorts us to have “no divisions among us” but instead to be united in the same mind. [***“I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you would be united in the same mind and the same judgment.” – 1 Cor. 1:10***]

So how do we get to there?

First, **we need to be filled with the HS**, attached to the Lord, since all the things we will be talking about are impossible in our flesh. I want to welcome you to Pittsford Community Church this morning, where we believe that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, and if you would put your faith in him that God will forgive your sins, bring you into his eternal family, fill you with life everlasting and give you the power of His HS to live out that life here on this earth as you keep your eyes on him. Would you make that choice to follow Jesus this morning? We need to be renewed through an encounter with Christ and the power of the gospel. That’s the first thing we need to be successful in our relationships.

What’s the second? **We need to catch the foxes.** My experience tells me that very few people do what is necessary to live in health in their relationships, marriage or otherwise. Instead, what I see is that many are content to live in disfunction – either because it’s easier or because they don’t see/understand the disfunction. But listen: God has a better way. And he’s given us his Word as a roadmap for our health and good. That’s why we need to know what it says. That’s why we need to be living according to its truth. Lest we settle for something less than God’s best.

Now, I know this is a long intro this morning, and eventually we will be turning over to chapter 6, but I wanted to start this morning in Song of Solomon chapter 2 because that’s where we find the theme verse for our series, chapter 2 verse 15 where Solomon writes, ***“Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom.”***

Now, let’s stop there for a moment. To fully understand this, we need to understand something about the book itself.

The Song of Solomon is a book of poetry. And if we are to understand it, we need to understand its use of allegory and metaphor. As poetry, a lot of the imagery used is not meant to be understood literally, but as a representation of something. Otherwise, you’d get a woman looking something like this. **(pic 1)** OR this **(pic 2)** And you’d think to yourself, “I don’t know what this guy is looking at.”

Fair? And in the context of this poetic, relational dance, God says, ***“Catch the foxes.”*** What foxes? The little foxes that spoil the vineyard.

So we before we wade out into the depth that truth this morning. **Let’s pray.**

You don’t have to know much about foxes or vineyards in order to get this verse. There are a lot of grape vineyards in the land of Israel. In the early spring, the foxes show up and bite off the new shoots, just like rabbits and deer do here. Further, the foxes also dig and chew away at the roots of the vines. If they don’t outright kill the vines themselves, they then would come and eat the fruit right off the vine as it develops. To the vineyard owner, foxes mean trouble.

I was talking to a buddy of mine this week, and he was sharing a story of how he has chipmunks at his house. If you've had chipmunks, you know they dig holes and kill your grass. They're a nuisance, A cute nuisance, but a nuisance nonetheless. Well he, being the kind-hearted soul he is, decided to be humane and not to kill the buggers when he caught them, but to take them out to the woods and release them. Anyone want to guess what happened? According to WildlifeAnimalControl.com – where I get all of my animal control information from – they say that the animals will find their way home from as much as **5 miles away!**

Here's the point the passage is trying to make: **the foxes are not meant to caught and released. They're meant to be caught and killed**, lest they come back to disrupt again. Listen: there was an unending warfare carried on against the foxes in Bible times. The grape-growers constantly had to catch them and kill them off.

When it comes to our relationships, do you know that there is an unending warfare going on? If Satan is going to attack, it is most often going to be targeted at relationship. As a pastor, I see little foxes ruining so many marriages. As a counselor, I see how little foxes over long periods of time have led to big problems and massive, sometimes irreparable, devastation.

Listen, Foxes are small. They don't seem like a big deal. They don't seem dangerous. Foxes are not strong like a wolf, nor are they threatening like a bear. You can't compare a fox to a huge animal like a bull elephant in Africa that can trample down whole fields in just a few hours. There are big things that ruin relationships: things like adultery or abuse. God has a lot to say about the horrific devastation those big things can cause. **But listen: rarely does it start there.** It starts with the little foxes, which if left unchecked, are capable of doing terrible damage. They burrow and chew and dig and pick until the vines wither and become unproductive.

And by the way, I would caution that the same is often true of God's church. It's the little foxes that we allow to creep in. Little compromises. Lack of communication. Unresolved personal offenses. Gossip or behind the back conversations about another. Self-centered thoughts or motivations. These are examples of *little things* (say it back to me church, what are they?), little foxes that destroy community, break down relationship, and cause division. To use another metaphor, bringing about "death by a thousand cuts." Little unresolved issues which if allowed to fester, slowly, gradually pull our eyes and our hearts away from God and one another.

But here's the truth, church, I'm excited. I'm excited because I believe that catching the foxes is a winnable battle. Becky and I have been married for 17 years, and I am unashamed to say that, by God's grace, our marriage now is stronger than it has ever been. And listen, that's not because I'm a pastor, in many ways it's in spite of my being a pastor. It's because we've put in the work, and gone after God's wisdom. We've chosen to kill the little foxes as they appear instead of ignoring or even feeding them.

So that said, turn with me to Song of Solomon chapter 6 and let's talk about our first little fox: The little fox of discord. What is discord? It's friction in a relationship. It's conflict, strife, disagreement, hostility, disagreement).

Prov. 6:16 says, ***"There are seven things the Lord hates...one who sows discord among brothers."***

Look at chapter 6:1, ***"Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you?"***

Show of hands: Anyone here ever gotten into a tiff with someone? Ever fought with your spouse? Argued with a family member? Been offended by someone, maybe even someone sitting in a pew this morning? It happens. God understands that it happens. It's a by-product of living in relationship with others. And in that moment what happens to that relationship? There's a separation, a departure that happens. Might be physical. Might be emotional. It's the classic "I love you, but I just don't want to see your face right now."

That's alluded to in this verse. "Where has your beloved gone?" Gone is the word "halak." It means "to depart or move away from" either physically or relationally. The others also ask, "Where has your beloved turned?" Turned is the word: pa-na. It means "to turn from or to look away."

Here, there has been a separation of relationship. Why? We don't know. But it's happened. And now the man and the woman are apart.

Listen: when conflict happens, when relational separation happens, there is a turning away from the other person – physically, in mind, sometimes in spirit. And in that, what's the little fox? What's the danger? **The danger comes when, in the turning away, the relationship never fully comes back together.** When there's no heart or intentionality to reconcile that relationship, or to go after mending it. The little fox of discord roams when there's no resolve to bring resolution and healing to the discord in the relationship.

When discord happens, too often we allow the little fox to roam. Why? Because it's easier. Because we don't want to make a mountain out of a molehill. Because we feel like we can absorb it, or get over it, or stuff it down. Sometimes the little fox roams because "pa-na" we turn to other things (the computer, our mother, the pastor, friends) instead of resolving it with the other person.

Beloved, catch the fox. Communicate in a spirit of humility and love. Seek understanding and conflict resolution. If you don't know how to do those two things well, a little bit of coaching or counseling can go a long way in bringing health to that relationship. There's no shame in that. God wants us to be strong.

But listen, beloved, those things alone cannot kill the fox. Here's where this hits home. God's word is so rich in its wisdom. Look at verses 2 and 3. ***"My beloved has gone down to his garden to the beds of spices, to graze in the gardens and to gather the lilies. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine; he grazes among the lilies."***

Listen: **When there is relational separation, where we go is of utmost importance.** Where did the man go? He went home. He went to his place of value. He turned to the place his heart was. He went back to the deepest things that really mattered. And look who is speaking. It's not the dude. It's the woman! The woman says, "I *know* where he's gone. I don't need to *seek* him out. His heart is *with* me. His heart is *for* me. We are in this *together*. We are on the same team. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine."

That word "graze" in the Hebrew is an interesting word. You probably have a footnote that says, "pasture." Translating concepts into other languages is often a difficult task. It's even more difficult when you are translating poetry. But the word used here "ra a" is a word which means "to tend, to shepherd, to pastor." Here's the important truth: **When conflict happened he went back to tend, to shepherd, to pastor that relationship.** To tend the gardens of that relationship. To build intimacy again.

Beloved, that's how you kill the fox. In the marriage relationship, does your spouse know that your heart is for them? For the relationship? That you are fully in with the Lord at the center, fully committed to it? To them? For their good? For their blessing? That's where home is? That's where your heart is? That's where your priority is? That's where your desire is? You want your marriage to be full of hot – happening – lump in the throat – sweaty palms – pounding heart – can't wait to get with you love? Get on that program. Catch and kill the fox that would cause division between you.

That's why God says, "Don't be unequally yoked." Because it's hard to catch that fox if your hearts, convictions, and passions on a fundamental level are divided.

And in our relationships outside of marriage, especially with those who are part of the body of Christ, are we for one another? Do we seek understanding? Forgiveness? Reconciliation? Or do we hold grudges? Do we view one another as being on the same team? Do we seek to protect one another from harm? Do we seek unity?

We won't do that perfectly, but we should be vigilant when the fox enters in the vineyard. Don't ignore it and pretend it isn't there. For heaven's sake, don't feed it. Mend the fences. Be a peacemaker. Seek unity. Kill the fox.

Let's ready our hearts for communion.

When Jesus came and died for the sins of the world, the bible tells us that one of the things he accomplished in that act was the tearing down of the dividing wall of hostility, so making peace. This first and foremost is understood in reference to our relationship with God. We who are far off, in Christ, are brought near to the Father. By his blood we are forgiven. So making peace. And before taking communion it is important to have that relationship in place as it isn't communion that saves us but our relationship with Christ.

But that wasn't the only wall of hostility torn down. Christ's act of love also tears down the wall between you and I. You and your neighbor. You and your spouse. Because as his own, Christ himself is our peace. In him, we have been given a new identity. In him, we have been made

complete, lacking nothing. Therefore, that frees us to show the same love with which God loved us to one another.

The little fox of discord grieves the heart of God. And as you come to his table this morning, come with a prayer – that God would show you where that fox has been allowed to roam in your life, that you might honor the Lord by killing the fox with his heart of reconciliation.



LITTLE FOXES

Song of Solomon 2:15

“That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may be in us...”

- John 17:21



LITTLE
FOXES

“I appeal to you, brothers and sisters...that there be no divisions among you, but that you would be united in the same mind and the same judgment.”

- 1 Cor. 1:10



LITTLE
FOXES

“Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom.”

- Song of Solomon 2:15



LITTLE
FOXES

The Song of Solomon illustrated

(For our literalist friends.)

"How beautiful you are, my darling,
how beautiful you are!

...Your eyes are like doves behind
your veil...

...Your hair is like a flock of goats...

...Your teeth are like a flock of
newly shorn ewes...

...Your lips are like a scarlet
thread...

...Your temples are like a slice
of pomegranate...

...Your neck is like the
tower of David - built
with rows of stones
on which are hung a
thousand shields...

...Your two breasts are
like two fawns,
twins of a gazelle
which feed among the
lilies...

...Your lips, my bride,
drip honey... honey and
milk are under your tongue,

And the fragrance of your
garments is like the
fragrance of Lebanon...

...Your navel is a round goblet...

...Your belly is like
a heap of wheat...

...your nose is like the
tower of Lebanon,
which faces toward
Demascus..."

...from
Song of Solomon
Chapters
four and
seven...



Song of Solomon 4:1-5





LITTLE FOXES

Song of Solomon 2:15

Truth:

***Foxes are not meant to be caught and released;
they are meant to be caught and killed.***



LITTLE
FOXES

Little Foxes:

1) The Little Fox of Discord

“There are seven things the Lord hates...one who sows discord among brothers.”

- Prov. 6:16, 21



LITTLE
FOXES

“Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you?”

- Song of Solomon 6:1



LITTLE
FOXES

“My beloved has gone down to his garden to the beds of spices, to graze in the gardens and to gather the lilies.

I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine; he grazes among the lilies.”

- Song of Solomon 6:2-3



**LITTLE
FOXES**