

“Lot’s Choice”  
 Sermon for 28 July 2019  
 Texts: Genesis 13 and Mark 9:14-27

“Seeking our spiritual welfare” is always the best wisdom when it comes to making choices. Have you considered Christ, friend? We would ask such a thing as in your best interests.. Having trusted the welfare of our being to Christ, we would ask out of the profoundest of convictions that Christ alone is concerned for our well-being—ask perhaps for a moment of rescue, or of love coming from some unseen quarter, lifting, enlightening us.

This mercy of God in Christ is not immediately apparent when Jesus comes down off the Mountain of Transfiguration on the nether slopes. What he does is a quick assessment of what was in everyone’s spiritual well-being in the tumult and uproar of the moment. Abram would not have considered Christ’s mercy half so much as the grace, and generosity of God in seeking him out right and early. In locating him amidst the hubbub of heathen life (**O faithless generation!**), the allurements of idolatrous living—although that stream is still very much with us. People are still trapped in impurity of faith, some more mindlessly and others more cluelessly. Have you considered the generosity of God? I ask, or about the kindness, the truth . . . his praise, his purpose and his glory? I declare it was for the glory of God that Jesus descended the mountain and entered the fray. It was to the Father’s glory that anyone was delivered, or saved that tumultuous day. And it is when God speaks that we become aware of the importance of a choice . . . even our own Lot’s choice.

The nine disciples who had remained behind are surrounded by a large, and I take it, angry if not hostile crowd. **The scribes are arguing with the disciples.** (v.14) *Is this spiritual, godly, even helpful?* Or is the boy’s need simply an occasion to defame Jesus, discredit his disciples? The crowd, apparently **amazed at his appearance**—an appearance reminiscent of Moses’ “glow” at his re-entries after consulting with the Lord God on the mountain, in the cloud?—the crowd comes rushing up to him. **What are you arguing about with them?** Jesus asks his disciples. But the distraught father in the crowd spoke up, **“Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and, they were not able.”** (vv. 17-18) One has to wonder was this a set up? So, there was a spiritual “power encounter,” and the disciples, challenged to cast out this tormenting demon, proved impotent to do so. The scribes seized upon this “failure,” no doubt, as some kind of proof of Jesus’ fraudulent claims to be the Messiah. *Few things empty the faith tank quicker than a manifest ministry failure.* They imputed the disciples powerlessness to Jesus so as to impugn, or discredit the Master of these disciples. Perhaps their boast of previous successes were played back in an insulting and taunting manner. That would be in keeping with this opening spiritual brawl, but we cannot know that. What we do know is that they are perplexed by the whole business (Mark 9:28).

Here Jesus exclaims, **O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?** It would not be necessarily helpful to restrict this reproach to the disciples only. I would have liked to be there and to considered that question—to resolve questions like “Is he talking to me?” or Is he talking to all of us?” Jesus probably was fed up with the faithless of the whole crowd, all of the combatants and all onlookers

included. However, this served to shift the crowd's attention and unify it around something other than an attack on the disciples. **Bring him to me.** It does not appear that the spirit came willingly, or nicely: **And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy . . . And Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?"**

Jesus as a master peacemaker has adroitly steered things away from the argument, and from the faithlessness of some involved, and has awakened a compassionate awareness of the real need, or crisis at hand:

Jesus diverts, or diffuses the anger.

Jesus changes the focus of the encounter.

Jesus domesticates the group dynamics.

How? By reminding everyone, that disputes aside this really is a deeply painful family matter—at least for the father and son..

No one trying to win an argument is trying to win that argument now!! Jesus identifies the stakeholders, starting with the boy's father. Now, it is implied that in bringing the boy to him, Jesus separates the child and his father from the crowd—there is some space for investigation, **From childhood. And it has often cast him into the fire and into water, to destroy him.** Of course, that is the typical end/goal of demonic oppression—not pain, not torment, not even terrorizing the parents—but *death and certain destruction*.

**"But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us,"** pleads the father. **And Jesus said to him, "If you can!"** Now, in view of what Jesus has just declared in the hearing of all, **O faithless generation, this** is a most astonishing retort. Jesus *defers* to the father, **"If you can"** means even you can do something about this! **All things are possible to one who believes.** Jesus humbly(?) deflects attention from himself and elevates belief as the chief quality in deliverance ministry<sup>1</sup>, in miracles. The solution lies within the father's heart (in his faith potential) who cries out, **I believe, help thou my unbelief.** It is one thing to want a total deficit, and quite another to want assistance with what you already possess!

Now Jesus notices the crowd **running together** towards them, and almost as if to spare everyone a scene, **he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you to come out of him and never enter him again."** (v.25) So the spirit convulsed the boy horrible and left him for dead on the ground. I put it this way because **most of them said, "He is dead."** (v. 26) And because **Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up** just as Jesus had done previously with Jairus' dead daughter! (Mark 5:21)

I leave the narrative here because my purpose is to stress the *mediation process, the conflict resolution* involved in this deliverance event. I want to stress Jesus as peacemaker because that is exactly the same character as we witness in Genesis 13 between Abram and Lot. This is Jesus, just like Abram!, seeking the spiritual welfare of all those involved—through conflict resolution. Therefore:

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<sup>1</sup> I have, in my practice of deliverance ministry, have taken to asking those who do not believe that Jesus is able to deliver to leave the room where prayers for deliverance are about to be offered up. Not only will they not help, they may risk some harm by exposure.

- He quickly identifies the cause for strife/conflict
- He defuses the situation (lowering the tensions/hostility/anger/fear)
- He disarms his critics by listening and then listening deeply
- He determines the stake holders and what's a stake
- He uncovers what's negotiable, develops trust
- He moves towards closure, resolution and, if at all possible reconciliation

With Abram and Lot, upon their prosperous return from Egypt, we note that strife breaks out between the herdsmen over pasturage and water for the vast flocks and herds. Knowing the kindness, the provision, yes, and providence of God, Abram is concerned to display these attributes in himself in the here and now of squabbling herdsmen and of disgruntled kin. **Insofar as it lies with you, be at peace with all men** (Romans 12:18) applies for us. ***You will be a blessing to all families*** would be more suitable to Abram's life and ***seem like a goal worth pursuing right now.***

Under the rubric of, let there be no strife, we are brothers, conflict is unavoidable, strife occurs—what we do about it is subject to our will—***it's a choice***. Friendship is a choice. Abram seeks to play the peacemaker—certainly we should too, no less than he. *Or, the God in him draws him out in selflessness—the same selflessness that is the cornerstone of his calling and basis of his friendship with God.* As I reflect on it, maybe “Are you friends with Jesus?” might do quite as well as “Have you considered Christ?” We cannot offer others what we do not have—are we friends with Jesus, with God?

The problem between the two main actors in Genesis 13 is rooted in character—***greed is a character flaw***—despite its practical origins in the field tussles *over fodder and water* among their herdsmen! *And if the Spirit's job is to p[resent us flawless before the throne—this flaw has got to go.* Abram, the spiritual man (the generous one with *vital piety*), is found in open conflict with Lot, the man of sense, the carnal man and his relative. Everyone is watching—just as at the mountain-side deliverance—where all eyes are on Jesus and some of them are hostile. Abram is very concerned with family and relationship *just like Jesus*—Lot is more absorbed with wealth and pleasure, with external advantage and short term gain—so whereas Abram is taking a long view, and is patient, Lot is into immediate gratification and is impatient. What has become clear is that they are not united by similar character—only by blood ties and a long history of interaction. Their love devolves from long association, lacking in depth. Whereas Abram is very aware that what he has presently is not all there is—the future promises hold more and better blessings. Lot believes differently that what we have is all there is and he wants his share immediately. Cutting a deal and sending him off is the best to be done. Notably the promises of God weren't to him, or for him!

- The cause for strife was Lot's carnality, greed for wealth and pleasure
- Abram defuses with **there's no need for strife** (analogous to **what are you arguing about?**)—“Here, choose your portion first.” (It would seem that Abram put the Promised Land at risk, or at least into jeopardy; but not really, Lot would not be inclined to chose anything other than what appears to his immediate and greatest advantage. *He chooses selfishly and foolishly and predictably.* So he chose the best grazing, the glitter of the five cities—of course! Apparent wealth reminded him of Egypt which is what his flesh craved.) Lot's craven greed made him quick to choose.

His lukewarm interest in God deprived him of spiritual resources and so he, and not Abram, was sorted out and ruined by the spoils of Egypt. Where Abram seems to grow, Lot appears to wither!

- **If you will take the left hand, I will take the right.** This openness disarmed Lot.
- Having discerned what is at stake, who the stakeholders were, Abram created a trust born of fearless generosity, and so the settlement was negotiated. They separated resolving the tension. Generosity carried the day. ***Selflessness is a winning character trait—it supplants the place of greed and self-interest.***
- Closure resulted as the separation required of Abram (from the beginning of the call!) was effected. Conflict is often a consequence of neglect and delay? As a result, God reiterates the promises of Gen. 12:1-3 and 7 in Gen. 13:14-17.

But there is more behind this matter than merely a difference of character and ambition. *Abram chooses as he does because he is chosen.* He lives as one who knows that God has his back—that his spiritual well-being is God's concern. The impact of that choice transforms Abram—he is incredible similar to the child Jesus delivered. Lot has not been chosen, or delivered—which makes his elevation to the ranks of the righteous curious. He was a carnal man; a low life materialist pursuing sensual pleasure and immediate gratification. He is soul dead. How long has this been going on? From childhood . . . and the intent of it is utter destruction. By mercy alone Lot and his two daughters, acclimated residents of Sodom and truly bad girls are spared immediate judgment. Unless God intervenes all is hopeless. Therefore God chose Abram.

Scripture declares Lot was righteous and that **he was vexed** by the sinful conditions into which he entered. Why? However, it is supposed that he may have married a woman from Sodom—he appears to have been single at the time of this separation from his godly uncle. Lot subsequently *loses all the wealth he accumulated* either to plunder in warfare, or destruction in the city's judgment. He walked away from godly company and healthy friendships and so lost everything. His spiritual decline did not stop with the move to Sodom. Afterwards, when he escaped to the city Bela (meaning *destruction*) and later renamed Zoar (meaning *insignificance*), he incestuously fathered the Ammonites and the Moabites—his children proved inveterate foes of Israel throughout her history! Surely this narrative is a caution not to judge by appearances *because the appearances of Lot's biography are quite unhappy—debauched, immoral, unfortunate.* We might highlight this by noting that while Abram returned to Bethel (a renewed worship of God and a second chance) Lot headed for the brothel and never really escaped. SO, let us in closing also return.

Seeking our spiritual welfare is always the best wisdom when it comes to making choices. Have you considered Christ, friend? We would ask such a thing of others having trusted the welfare of our being to Christ. And we would ask out of the profoundest of convictions that Christ alone is concerned for all our well-being—perhaps a moment of rescue, or of love coming from some unseen quarter, lifting, enlightening us. Is there anyone we can pray this for? Is there anyone seeking peace with God? Then **Kiss the Son lest he be provoked to anger** (Psalm 2L12). **Amen**