

“The Barney Principle”

Mark 7: 24-37

24 Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep His presence secret. 25 In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at His feet. 26 The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

27 “First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” 28 “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” 29 Then He told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.” 30 She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

31 Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. 32 There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Him to place His hand on the man.

33 After He took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put His fingers into the man’s ears. Then He spit and touched the man’s tongue. 34 He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “Ephratha!” (which means, “Be opened!”). 35 At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

36 Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more He did so, the more they kept talking about it. 37 People were overwhelmed with amazement. “He has done everything well,” they said, “He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.” (NIV)

(Start singing the Barney theme song) “I love you, you love me, we’re a happy family, with a great big hug and a kiss from me to you, won’t you say you love me too?...” I heard it on TV all the time when my now 33 year old son was in elementary school. Barney and Baby Bop actually came to Grand Rapids back in 2003. Did any of you see Barney the purple dinosaur and Baby Bop live in concert? NO? Why not? How many of you would want to see the Power Rangers or the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles or Tele Tubbies? Why aren’t any of you raising your hands?

Why do you think that there are so many parents who hate Barney or the Tele Tubbies? Veggie Tales are a little better but there are probably many of you who wonder why anybody would watch that on purpose?

It used to be teenagers that set their parents’ teeth on edge with their music and the stuff they liked on TV now it is 2, 3, and 4 year olds already. Barney has set a new precedent. There is a whole host of Anti-Barney Internet guerillas who have declared war on this poor purple dinosaur. Listen to some of the of the Barney questions being asked online in the early 2000’s. “Is Barney the Beast and the Dragon predicted in the Biblical book of Revelation? What’s the connection between Barney and the McDonald’s Evil Grimace? How can the Purple Scourge be stopped?”

These kind of rantings were fairly harmless as long as they were confined to a few chatrooms. But hatred rarely restricts itself to neat compartments. Children learn from us so well that they will quickly replace their own love with our hate and act on it. The following noticed appeared in a newspaper in 1993: “Fine levied on each of three children convicted in Texas of assaulting a man dressed as Barney the Dinosaur. \$200.” Why all this fuss over a costumed character who does nothing but prance around with a bunch of mythically good children singing songs? Barney’s “signing off” song is a little mushy, but how can you get offended by “I love you, you love me, we’re a happy family with a great big hug and a kiss from me to you, won’t you say you love me too.” What’s wrong with that?

A well-known children’s author named Maurice Sendak was asked in a National Public Radio interview, “What do you think of Barney the Dinosaur?” Sendak replied, “Barney proves two things. First, that taste is taught. Kids are not born with it. Second, that kids will respond to anybody that gives them attention.” Hmmm? What do you think about that? Do we hate the purple dinosaur because we are jealous or because we feel guilty? When our little children are watching Barney, they sense that all the creative energy and silly songs on the screen are fully directed towards them. Barney is aimed specifically at 2-5 year olds. Their needs and concerns are the center of Barney’s attention—and it is tough for busy parents to compete with that. We have to admit it. Barney has done real well at reaching kids in the 2-5 year old range and he did it for almost two decades from 1992 till 2010 and reruns easily available through 2015. Last year they came out with a fully animated version that is still available. Barney and Friends.

Why did Barney and Friends and the Tele Tubbies do so well? Because they were specifically aimed at 2-5 years olds. The Power Rangers and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is aimed at ages 6-12. These programs are totally focused on a specific age range. The music, the words, ...everything about these shows is focused on reaching a specific age range and their likes, dislikes, the mentality.

Let me let you in on a secret. YOU are not supposed to like Barney or the Tele Tubbies. My parents hated some of the TV shows I liked as a kid like the Banana Split Show, Speed Buggy and Scooby Doo. That’s because we adults are not supposed to like them. They are totally focused on a much younger audience.

I believe that our text this morning and circumstances around the big C Church are telling us that we better learn the Barney Principle and learn it fast! As a church and culture we need to learn the Barney Principle. How do you know if you are “doing well” at children’s ministry? The Barney Principle says that your ministry with children is working (reaching the children) if there are parts that drive the adults up the wall. How do you know if you are “doing well” with your youth ministry? The Barney Principle says that your ministry with youth is effective if some of the songs they sing, some of the things they do, some of the language they use, does to you what the sound of fingernails on a blackboard does. **[NOTE 1]**

How do you know if your “doing well” reaching the lost? The Barney Principle says that your ministry with seekers and unbelievers is bearing fruit if you find yourself going places, doing things, and participating in services you had no intention of going to, doing, or participating in.

If you want to reach someone, you’ve first got to find them. You have to know where they are coming from and where they are at? Jesus, is the first and prime example of the Barney Principle. Jesus as adaptable and flexible...even while the central core of His teaching and preaching remained unchanged. Jesus could tell what people were desperately needing to hear, what kind of healing their bodies and their souls cried out for, and he addressed those needs with respect and sensitivity. In the midst of the scholarly synagogue community he demonstrated His profound knowledge of Scripture and tradition. When preaching to a bunch of country folk, he talked about sheep and shepherds. His easy accepting manner made Him an invited dinner guest to the homes of tax collectors and other well-known sinners. He obviously made both women and little children feel comfortable in His presence and free to approach Him. Whatever the situation Jesus found Himself in, He did well because He genuinely cared for and loved people where they were at. **[NOTE 2]**

Jesus’ varied healing techniques also reflect this ability to personalize and contextualize His ministry to the needs of others. Jesus did not use one standard method of healing. Listen to His diverse healing styles: “Take you bed and go to your home” (Matt. 9:6) “Stretch out your hand” (Matt. 12:13), “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam,” (John 9:7), “Lazarus, come forth,” (John 11:43), “Be made clean,” (Luke 5:13), and “Your faith has made you well,” (Mark 5:34). In this week’s text, Jesus heals in a way that communicates His healing intentions with “hands-on” force that even a man who could neither hear nor speak could understand. Jesus also heals in a way that doesn’t even require the presence of the one He is healing (He had only to see the faith of the little girl’s mother. There is no magic formula for reaching people or healing people. There is not one and only one way to do things. There is only one way to heaven and that is through Jesus Christ. But there are a myriad of ways that people come to be moved to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. **[NOTE 3]**

Are we here at Doster Community Church willing to do the extraordinary, the uncommon, or the uncomfortable to do well for the sake of the gospel? Are we able to put the goal of communicating the good news of Jesus Christ above all else? People of God, we have the cure for death! Can we put the goal of making disciples above our own personal likes and dislikes, interests and concerns? Are we even willing to accept different styles and spirits in our own church? The Barney Principle tells us that we are not supposed to like everything our church does! If you like everything that the church does? The only people that we are reaching are people just like you!

Every activity planned, every workshop offered, every retreat sponsored, every discipleship group, every sermon that is preached, every song that is sung, every guest speaker brought in, every concert put on, every policy passed should not be chosen to make me happy, you happy or any one group happy! What matters is that all we do is

done for Christ's sake and is done well following the example that Jesus gave us. The three most important imperatives in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are loving God, loving our neighbor, and going out to make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them everything Jesus commanded! The Barney Principles tells us that we should be bugged about some of the things our church does because the church is for the whole family of God, not just for people just like us!! **[NOTE 4]**

Sometimes Jesus used very unorthodox ways to reach people. In the case of the deaf and dumb person he took him aside and in a sense, used sign language to tell the guy that He was going to be healed! Jesus put His fingers in the ears of the deaf man, spit in his hand and touched the man's tongue. Then Jesus simply said, "Be opened!" and the man could speak plainly and he could hear!

At this time in the life of Doster Community Church we need to remember that Jesus gave up everything for us, to pay the price for our sins, the price we owed, to introduce us to God, to make a personal relationship with our Creator possible, to give us eternal life. Can we give up a little comfort to start reading the Bible with a friend, relative, neighbor, or acquaintance? Do we dare let ourselves be uncomfortable in the knowledge that whatever it is that we don't like, just might be the very thing that is reaching someone else in church who isn't exactly like us? The main goal! The main thing is to love God, love your neighbor, and go make disciples (fellow Christ-followers)! Think about it. Pray about it. What is God asking you to do, to change, to get involved in, that makes you uncomfortable, but reaches out to those in our community that are not exactly like us?? Love your neighbor as yourself. Love God above all. Live it out! Please write something down! **[NOTE 5]**

Let's pray ...Dear Lord God heavenly Father. Teach us how to reach out to the people of our community, teach us how to reach our unbelieving friends, make us aware of our shortcomings and help us to listen, to be open to Your will! Lord, give us the courage to reach out beyond our comfort zone to the people You are calling us to reach. Show us the people whom you want in our life. We ask it in the name of Jesus Christ!
AMEN

Sermon Notes for “The Barney Principle” based on Mark 7

Given at Doster Community Church on September 21, 2025

- I. The Barney Principle says that if you like everything about your church, the only people that you are likely to reach are people that are exactly like you. We are not supposed to love everything because there are people not like us attending that need something different.
- II. Whatever situation Jesus found Himself in, He did well because He genuinely cared for and loved people where they were at and adjusted His ministry style so they would be impacted. He never compromised the essential message!
- III. Are we willing to be uncomfortable for the sake of the gospel? Can we make becoming disciple-makers by the power of the Holy Spirit by standing on the Word, walking in love, and resting in the arms of Jesus the priority...above all likes, dislikes, interests, and concerns?
- IV. The three main imperatives in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are Love God, Love your neighbor, and go make disciples!
- V. What are you going to do about it? Is there an attitude adjustment necessary? What can we do to focus on the “main three things” today ...this week?? Please write something down?!