

The Great Adventure

Mark 1:14-21

Sunday, June 7, 2009.

Wow, what a big day this is! It's really good to be here. It feels like coming home, and seeing family again.

You're probably wondering what I've been doing the past couple of years. Well, I've been buried in the books at Princeton Seminary, working on a doctorate in preaching--the theory, practice, and history of preaching. I've been taking courses, and teaching courses, and writing papers and articles, and preparing to write a dissertation. And now I'm at the point in my program where I can take the next step in my ministry and begin serving a church. So this is a big day in my life.

And you are at the point where you are ready to take the next step in your journey, and call your next pastor. This is a big moment in the life of this church. This hasn't happened in forty years!

So, it's a big moment. When Jesus began his ministry on earth, he began by talking about a big moment. Listen to this passage from the gospel according to Mark, the first chapter, verses 14-20.

"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'" As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him."

Let's pray. *Lord we have heard your word read, the word through which you have promised to speak. We have come here today for many reasons. But we know that the deepest reasons, and the greatest needs, can only be met by a word from you. So speak to us as we listen carefully for your voice. In Jesus Christ, Amen.*

So Jesus begins his ministry by declaring, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news." Now to understand what Jesus means by this, we have to understand a little bit about two Greek words for time. One word is the word *chronos*, which is time like the ticking of the clock. What time is it? It's 10:02--we're going to be here for a while. The other word is *kairos*, which is a special time, a big moment, an appointed time. It's like when the minister is gathered with the groom and the groomsman in the back room just before the ceremony, and the minister says, "It's time."

The minister doesn't mean, "It's 6 o'clock." The minister means, "This is the moment. It's time to go out and take your vows."

So Jesus is talking about this kind of time--this big moment, this appointed time. And it's a moment that is bigger and grander than all of the moments of our lives. Because it is the moment that God is breaking to history and is changing the world. And Jesus declares that this moment has arrived, and he calls everyone to turn around and see it and believe it. And just after he does this, he starts calling disciples to follow him. To follow him in this great moment. To follow him, to walk with him, and to participate with God as God is changing the world.

When the Pastor Nominating Committee and I first talked about this day, Tina was telling me about what's going on at the church and she mentioned the theme of the children's program this year. It's "Walking with Jesus." (By the way, the children's program is next Sunday at 11--there's your advertisement!) Well, that theme stuck with me. And as I kept thinking about it, I thought this is a great theme for this day. Partly because we have two baptisms on this day. And 'walking with Jesus' is a metaphor for the Christian life, the life we enter in baptism. But as I thought about it more, I kept wondering what kind of walk is it? What is this walk with Jesus like?

So I began to read the gospel according to Mark. I read the gospel according to Mark, and paid close attention to the kind of life the disciples were having with Jesus--what their walk was like. And I began to realize that their 'walk with Jesus' was really an adventure. It was not just a walk with Jesus--it was an adventure with Jesus.

Now how can a walk be an adventure? A couple years ago Caitlin and I took a road-trip across the country to the Grand Tetons. We didn't plan to go to the Grand Tetons, we just headed out west, and ended up in the Grand Tetons. We found a gorgeous spot to set up camp--right on Jackson lake. So we set up our tent, and decided to head out for a walk. We didn't want much of a walk, just a couple hours. We took the nearest trail that was marked, "Hiking Trail," and we had a half bottle of water, and we struck out. We had no idea where it went. Well, we walked and walked for about a half-hour. And the further we walked the more nervous I got. We rarely ran into anyone. And this was bear season at the Grand Tetons--we were warned that bears were near our campground. And I said to Caitlin, I don't know where we're going, and we don't have any water. And she said, "I know we don't have any water--you keep drinking it all!" But we decided to keep going, and after another half-hour we met some hikers. I asked, "Where does this go?", and they told us that it went to a overlook. So kept going, and after another half-hour--and after climbing a mountain--we finally came out into the most beautiful and spectacular view we had ever seen. It was panoramic of the whole valley.

What started out as a walk became an adventure. We didn't know where we were going, we didn't know how long it would take, we didn't know if we had enough water to make it to the end, and we knew that the path wasn't safe. But as we went, we discovered that what

started as a walk ended up being an adventure. The Christian life can often be like that. We start out slow, walking, taking small steps to follow Jesus. We come for baptism--either our parents bring us or we come ourselves. And we start there, and we take one step after another, and pretty soon we discover as we're following Jesus that we are actually on a great adventure.

This is the one thing I want you to remember if you don't remember anything else I say this morning--and you may not: walking with Jesus is the greatest adventure of our lives. Walking with Jesus is the greatest adventure of our lives. And in the time we have left, I want us to look at three characteristics of this adventure. Three things that make this walk with Jesus an adventure.

The first is that an adventure is exciting. When you read Mark's gospel, you quickly begin to realize that most un-exciting, uneventful thing that is going on in the disciples' lives happens right here in the text I read just now. They are by the Sea of Galilee casting a net into the lake. Now this was not a fishing vacation--these men were commercial fishermen. And around the Sea of Galilee, fishing was pretty good business--by the standards of that day, they were solid middle-class folks. And here they were going about their regular work--fishing for fish. And Jesus comes up to them in the middle of their work day and says, "Hey, come follow me, and you'll catch people instead of fish!" What did Jesus mean when he said, follow me and you'll catch people? I think he meant this...

Our lives about more than our jobs. Have you ever felt like you work all day just so you can come home and rest, in order to get back up the next day to do it again. And you work all week so you can come home and rest on the weekend, just to go back to work the next week. And you do that several months so you can get to take a vacation. And you do that for years until you can retire, and then it's over!? Well Jesus is teaching us that our lives are more than the sum of our jobs. God wants us to make more than a living, God wants us to make a life.

Life on the great adventure is exciting because it fulfills the greatest purpose of our lives. I was talking with someone just yesterday, a member of session, and he was telling me the story of how he came to be a part of this church. Basically, he was telling me how he started following Jesus. He said that since he came here, his life has been so full and rich. And he feels so blessed that he just loves to give it away. He said all he wants to do now is give others what God has given him.

It's not about the job we have--it's about who we follow. And following Jesus on the great adventure is exciting because it fulfills the greatest purpose of our lives. In Ephesians, Paul writes, "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life." This is what God designed and created us for--to follow Christ in our way of life.

Second, life on the great adventure is unusual. If we go a little further in Mark's gospel, we read this line... "and they were amazed, for they had never seen anything like before." Here's the story, and it happened just after Jesus called the disciples. Jesus was teaching in a house, and people gathered around. It was packed--a huge crowd. And there was a man nearby in the town who was paralyzed. His friends decided that they would get him to Jesus. So they picked him up, and started carrying him to Jesus. But the crowd was so thick, they couldn't get in. So they climbed up on the roof, and tore a hole in the thatch roof, and lowered their friend down into the house. So here was this man paralyzed on a mat in front of Jesus. And Jesus looks at him and says, "Your sins are forgiven. Get up and walk." Well, those around Jesus didn't like this at all. Who did he think he was to forgive sins--and they challenged Jesus on it. But Jesus responded: "What do you want me to do? I can say be healed, or I can say your sins are forgiven. I can do either." And when they realized this, they were amazed. For they saw and heard in Jesus a power they had never seen before. Jesus spoke and acted with the power of God.

Life on the great adventure is unusual because it is filled with the power of God. It is a life where God is working to do more than we dreamed or imagined could be done. Lives are changed, people are healed, addictions are broken. I think of this congregation, and the many of you who came here after deep betrayal, after a broken marriage, bearing a deep hurt in your childhood, in the grip of a desperate addiction. You came here in many ways lost, and you were found. You were found by Christ, and your life was restored--by the power of God working through the people in the congregation.

What is there in your life today that you need the power of God to get through? Perhaps you have a challenge you don't think you can face... "I can't face this illness, this loss, this grief, I can't face losing my job, I don't know what to do about raising my kids." I want you to know that the power of God is working in and through you and this congregation to do more than you can do by yourself. Trust God. You are not alone--God is working in your life to give you the power to face whatever comes. When John writes his letter to his church, he says, "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." God is working in you--in all of us--to do things that we could never do on our own.

Life on the great adventure is unusual because it is filled with the power of God. And finally, life on the great adventure is risky. This a lesson that took time for the disciples to learn, and it often takes time for us to learn it. In Mark 8, Jesus is telling the disciples about his life, what will happen to him. The writers says, "Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly." And when he said this, Peter--the same one Jesus called here by the sea of Galilee--said no, no Lord that will never happen.

But Jesus rebuked Peter, and said Peter, that's not the truth. It will happen to me like this--I will suffer. And Jesus went on to say, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will

lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” Here is the clue to the whole walk with Jesus--if you want to save your life, you must lose it.

Life on the great adventure with Jesus is *risky* because it is a life that is given away for others. On the very first Sunday that I came to Frenchtown, to ask about being an intern, Paul Pfisterer came to me after the service. There had been a flood in Byram that weekend, and the folks down there were in trouble. And Paul said that he was getting a group together to go down and help. I didn't go--and I wish I had. But I will never forget what an impression that made on me. There were so many things they could be doing on that beautiful Sunday afternoon. But they chose to give their lives away to help others. And in a few weeks, a mission team will leave from this church and do the same thing for folks in Massachusetts.

Life on the great adventure is risky because it is a life that is given away for others. When Paul is writing to Timothy, to pass on the ministry to him, he describes his life in these words: I am being poured out as a offering on the altar of their lives. I am being poured out. In visits to a grieving friend, trips to take someone to the doctor, phone calls to comfort the hurting, dinners for families in need, prayers for those we know and those we don't know. All this and so much more is how we give our lives away to those who need it, whoever needs it.

But the secret of it all is this. When we lose our lives in following Jesus Christ, we will find it. Jesus said, “I come that you may have life, and have it to the full.” We will find life to the full when we follow Christ on this great adventure. This is what God has designed and created us for--to follow Christ on an adventure that fulfills our deepest purpose, that is filled with the power of God, and gives our lives away to others in love.

Now, part of the reason I wanted to talk about this this morning is because I want you to know what I think the Christian life is like. And more than that, what kind of life I think God is calling us to, and what kind of life I hope for us to have together in this church as we follow Christ into the future.

But as we look at this great adventure that God lays out before us, there is an important decision to make. It is the most important decision, and it is to follow Jesus. It is the decision that the disciples made when Jesus called them by the Sea of Galilee, and said “Come! Follow me”, and they left their nets and followed him. And it is the call comes to us as well. As Jesus Christ comes into our lives, calls us to follow him on his way. To rise up and follow him on the greatest adventure of our lives.

Let us pray. *Lord you call us to follow you. You call us where we are, you call us by name, and you ask us to follow you on an adventure that fulfills our deepest purpose, that is filled with your power, and on which we will give our lives away for others. We want to trust you and follow you. We know we cannot do it on our own, but help us by your Holy Spirit so that we can trust you and we can follow you wherever you will lead us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*