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Notes for Three Rivers "Beyond Comfort"

Mat 16:13-23 When Jesus arrived in the villages of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "What are people saying about who the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some think he is John the Baptizer, some say Elijah, some Jeremiah or one of the other prophets." He pressed them, "And how about you? Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter said, "You're the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus came back, "God bless you, Simon, son of Jonah! You didn't get that answer out of books or from teachers. My Father in heaven, God himself, let you in on this secret of who I really am. And now I'm going to tell you who you are, really are. You are Peter, a rock. This is the rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out. "And that's not all. You will have complete and free access to God's kingdom, keys to open any and every door: no more barriers between heaven and earth, earth and heaven. A yes on earth is yes in heaven. A no on earth is no in heaven."

Mat 16:20 He swore the disciples to secrecy. He made them promise they would tell no one that he was the Messiah. Then Jesus made it clear to his disciples that it was now necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, submit to an ordeal of suffering at the hands of the religious leaders, be killed, and then on the third day be raised up alive. Peter took him in hand, protesting, "Impossible, Master! That can never be!" But Jesus didn't swerve. "Peter, get out of my way. Satan, get lost. You have no idea how God works."

What a trip from Peter. From the penthouse to the outhouse in a matter of minutes. From a rock to the ridiculous. From brilliant to brute in a conversation.

Opening illustration, SPRC. Where half thought I was brilliant, thoughtful and Christ honoring (how could they know me so well"☺) and the other half thought I was an idiot, a goof, and wondered who I was related to where someone as incompetent as I could have a job like this. How could they know me so well?:(

Maybe they were both right. Maybe heaven lives inside me and the ability to reflect the glory of God as well as darkness and this propensity to even ruin the work of God that is struggling to emerge. In a moment there is something alive in

Peter that is affirmed as beautiful and eternal, in the next breath he tries to subjugate the movement of God and Jesus directly names it. We must be separate from his person, something he said? Something thought that mirrors light and dark? An attitude that reflects heaven and hell?

Jesus already affirms Peter ... upon this rock. You've got it. I know you and I see through you, and I'm on to you and I love what I see. Jesus renames him, gives him a new identity, and gives him a face, distinctive. I believe in you, the hope of God will rest in you, I'm counting on you, the keys are given to you, Peter is privileged, blessed, "I'm so proud of you, pleased, satisfied,..." really close to heaven. To hear the voice of God saying, "you are enough for me".

And then Peter says something, thinks something that causes Jesus to call out Satan to "get behind", get lost, buzz off... it can't be personal or about Peter. Had to be about a spirit, an attitude, an atmosphere... that affirmed in a moment that Peter was really close to heaven and then really close to hell.

Peter's dark moment comes when he protests Jesus' movement to the cross or his embracing the mission or advancement to his Father's called goals. Peter liked Jesus around. In this moment not at all caring about the very mission for which God had come but focused on preference. "Jesus, aren't you here to take care of me, our own, bring comfort, a closed and safe system and ease?" In fact need apportionment dollars? Jesus catches a fish and ganks it out of its mouth. Hungry? Jesus multiplies Big Mac's. Frustrated with weird people? Jesus can cast devilish things out with a word and fix your small group. Too many crisis? Jesus awakens to calm the winds and waves. Sick of church bureaucrats? He can silence these fools with a question. It's no wonder that the comfortable thing is to keep Jesus as the home boy right next to Peter and the gang.

We worry about buildings, "bless me give me, do more for me" ... a focus on self, what's good for me and mine, survival, scarcity make me feel better, here to order God to make our lives more comfortable. It seems many times prayer in general, Joy and concerns in particular, are for God to makes us more cozy rather than an offering of ourselves to the way of the cross and commitment. "Bless me,

fix me, feed me, take care of me, give me...as usually the prayers begin our discourse and sadly even end there.

Illustration of Mekayla making the 500 copies of her birthday list and handing them out in worship. A list that include some 78 items of want, desire and material longings. It was cute for an 8 year old abused foster child, even appropriate ... but seems ugly when it's a 50 or 60 year old church member still rings that bell of selfishness.

When I came into the office a few weeks ago, I was greeted a letter from a local member of church upset because the pastor isn't doing what they "want". They are blaming the pastor for the decline of the church and do not see a reason to look at MissionInsite data or try something new to reach the unchurched.

*"The pastor spends more time on those outside of the church instead of the ones who pay his way" ... **"It is my belief that if the world wants to come to our church they are the ones who should adapt to us not us to them! This is OUR church."***

Jesus' way of life was to release comfort and to reject his own comfort. Instead he came from heaven to the middle of earth to be focused on the cross, to embrace a purpose, to live a mission, "I'm here to do the will of God", my will to conform to God's will, Here I am use me, ... a claim beyond self, or a what's good for the direction regarding making disciples. Not a volunteer (the language of flower clubs) but a slave a servant, who acknowledges a higher claim.

Preference leads to mean and inward congregations...possessive of what was never really theirs but God's. Preference leads to prayers that are only for self, songs that THEY like and ministry that is directed to them and their families. Preference leads to plaques and stained glass windows that are removed when a family gets mad and leaves the church. Preference leads to stagnation, frustration, unreal expectations, care taking, hospice, festering, decline, fear, defensiveness and death...eventually a DS coming to plant a "for sale" sign in front of the building.

ILL An older lady after worship who approached me saying, “You know what I want nothing but the old hymns and that old time religion preaching” ... I’m willing to listen and I do care... but not that much about what you want... I’d really like to know what Christ wants, what the unchurched is aching for... I long for you to create a setting Walk in and say, “this is what I have been looking for all my life”

Mission leads to outside of self, servant ministries that partner with God where every member is not to be served but to serve and find their own passionate place to reach others. Mission and self sacrifice and movement to the cross leads to the death of our own wants and desires and then to resurrection and new life and new possibilities. Mission leads to joy, heaven on earth and electricity in the parking lot, to beauty, goodness, inspiration, coaxes creativity and innovation possibilities hope, green growing leaning openness. Mission leads to the death of self and preference and leads to the joy of new life and fruit!

The prayer of a missional heart does not end with “bless me” but “bless you” not “make the pastor fix our church” but “here I am, send me, use me, spend me for your sake”. The missional heart that is really following Jesus rather than in his way, releases what is important to us from the past, in our to reach another for Christ in the present. How can we keep this to ourselves?

When we take a vow of membership in the United Methodist Church it is “I will be loyal” ... not the church will be loyal to me... but I will take a beating or bullet,
dependable no matter if we stay in this building,
trustworthy even if I don’t get a visit,
dedicated even if I don’t get a thank you note for living out my calling and
constant even if my favorite hymns are not sung on Sunday.

Honestly, do you know what I dislike about this calling as a DS? I’m so tired of low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, mundane gossip, and shallow talk, chintzy giving and dwarfed goals.

Annie Dillard... Why do people in church seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute? ... Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The

churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us to where we can never return."

What I love about this calling is to witness pastors and churches that say... It doesn't matter really what I want...I don't want any longer to be first, right, tops, recognized, rewarded, preeminent, prosperous, positions, promotions, platitudes, or popular. I want to find my calling in for such a time like this and live it out even if I don't get a visit or a phone call.

I love seeing churches and pastors that are willing to do follow Christ with their face set like Jesus to the mission; their gait fast, their goal heaven, the road narrow, their way uncomfortable, their guide reliable and the mission clear... to bring one more with us.

Beyond the pastors we like, theology prefer, settings that are comfortable, laity that are sometimes nearsighted frustrating, limited in their view of community, stuck into believing that it is their church... will you love them? Will you accommodate and meet them not where they should be but where they are? Keep nudging prodding looking innovating creating dreaming praying for Him who whispers in the night... would you still follow. Beyond pension, salary and mileage reimbursement... into the dark would you say yes again?

The gospel began and will advance beyond the comfort of those who dare to represent God...No wonder that it would be said that the story of God coming as one of us is foolishness to the unbelieving world a scandal to the religious. Embarrassing to those who believe to say that God was a weak little baby coming to a little cow or sheep town. For God messed his diaper in a backwater dump? God cried out in an out of the way reststop to somewhere? ... God came...whimpers of an infant and the suckling sounds of an newborn... meekly... quietly... modestly... self humiliation scandalously... without charm school.. without war tools... in beauty of gentleness..**vulnerable and at our mercy**

We have tried to make Christmas a sentimental schmaltz a card with the scandal taken out of it. Air brushed of the disgrace and humiliation of cattle smells and donkey pizzle and folly or foolishness and made it a comfortable middle class safety zone.

As Jesus turned water in wine I fear we, in the comfort of the institutional church, have turned wine in to water. The intoxicating wine of the news of unimaginable power into mushy grape jelly. He came to shock us and we have channeled the lighting through rods of churchy-ness. He came to turn our hearts to fire and we have poured water upon them.

1. I will build... Jesus said "MY" church. It was His, the church is His, the church will be his". Why do we waste time with plaques, fights, power plays and arguments about new forms of worship, if it brings one person to Christ then be blessed and sing. Some churches are looking deeper, surrendering more, witnessing and leaving the results to God.
2. Gave you the keys...

You who have Christ, have them. Maybe the keys are misplaced, in an old place. Keys to the very kingdom, You have the power to give heaven or hell, real people lost, you have the answer. You have a DNA that was fashioned to help unlock another human being and help to set them free.

You have the Peace, joy patience, kindness, that face of delight and goodness and truth and beauty, We can sparkle again.

Maybe evangelism is no longer saw dust and angry sermons maybe it is bridges of Love Its time we help God to rescue save salvage... in these urgent times, children without dads, culture that has video games kardashians and survivor shaping their hearts. Maybe we can again open hearts by accommodating not the message but the method. Wesley did indeed change the music, the setting, the delivery, and would meet the people who did not have Christ nor a relationship with the church on their terms not his.

"I love the commodious room, soft cushion, ornate windows and the handsome pulpit but out there in the fields are where the souls are saved. So out I go into the wilderness of this world to the highways and byways to the market and fairs and I shall share God's grace with the broken in the streets and lanes in the villages and barns and if need be in the farmers kitchens.- all this will be done in such a way as had never been done since the book of acts."

3. Nothing will stop the movement. Nothing, Nothing.. Not even the very openings of hell.

God's movement in the world cannot be stopped. God's movement in you cannot be stopped. River that has to flow around obstacles, Kingdome is relentless, inescapable, inevitable and unshakable. Within you who have Jesus, within me, with us God not only can but will fulfill his design. Suzanna Wesley, "God's promises are sealed and not dated". More sure than stars will shine, more certain than ocean being wet... you who are not playing church but love Jesus shall live. The work of God cannot be stopped. The very gates of hell cannot prevail.

The nations will come, justice will come down like water, the song will be sung, the church will worship, love will win, Christ will rule.

Pride will be melted, sins are burned, and eternal love will reveal its secret. You will be perfect, you shall be like him, when you see him as he is....God's favorite place is in the human heart. The work of God in you cannot be stopped.

Truly, the church of Christ will make it. The very gates of Hell will not prevail. Death could not hold Jesus, religiosity could not silence him, the governments of this world cannot destroy the movement, hatred, bitterness poverty and evil will not last. But If you have Christ in your hearts...The movement inside of you will live on and on. All of hell, economy, fear, the very devil himself we shall see as less than an irritating gnat and you who are loved by Christ and know it will make it. Christ will bring us the full way

Story of Sarah...

Backpacking in CO. with 13 year old who lost her dad

"I don't believe in God... either He doesn't care or is unwilling to save my dad or unable to stop that which he put into motion... either way don't need a God like that. In fact, give him a chance to show up at 5:30 if he has the guts to talk (when she's free after homework and before dinner) AND HE HAS NEVER COME. There is just not enough evidence to believe."

Christ left the safety, the preferred comfort of the intimacy of his fathers love to travel into human flesh, to be laid in a filthy manger, to move toward the Sarah in us, eventually to be hung on a cross for our anger fear selfishness and brokenness in order that we might know the love of God. You were designed to be the evidence. You are what God placed in front of the Sarah's of this world who are yet to be loved in the name of Christ, and yet to believe in His beautiful name.

Will you travel beyond comfort, preference and be the likings and breadcrumbs to meet Sarah in her pain and invite her to experience the deep and scandalous love of Jesus?