

<Numbers 11-10-16, 24-29; Psalm 19:7-14; Mark 9:38-50>

*Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you, O Holy One, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.*

Of them all, I would tell you that my favorite *Indiana Jones* movie is, "The Last Crusade." It's the one where Indy, our favorite 1940's archaeologist, must rescue his father by undertaking his father's lifetime quest: to find the Holy Grail, the cup of Christ. In many ways, it is to me a reflection of the journey of faith as much as it is an entertaining story. And of course, there is uncertainty and risk throughout the entirety of the story.

Especially near the end, when Indy must face three particularly challenging tests. These are meant as tests of faith, which our semi-agnostic protagonist struggles with on a somewhat existential level. Indy must look to the faith which he has spent so much of his life decrying and turning away from, if he is to have any chance of moving forward, of having any hope to reach his goal. And the last of these three tests is to take a leap of faith, almost literally, as he must step out into what seems to be the empty air of a chasm. The exhortation given him is that the faithful person who would seek the grail must walk in faith, and must trust God to provide the way.

Do we trust God to lead the way?

We are still the midst of the semi-crisis of faith the disciples are in. It's important for us to note that, narratively, they are still in the conversation, and the processing of such, of the teaching Jesus has given them about the nature of the Messiah and what is to come, both for him and also for them; our last three weeks of gospel readings from Mark are actually one extended conversation, with this week's reading picking up immediately where last week's reading left off. This is imperative to note. Especially when we remember that Mark's gospel, known for its brevity and straightforward approach, has now given us the same story in three different interactions. It is important, crucial even, to pay attention to this message in faith.

Because what the disciples are wrestling to comes to term with, and the larger questions that are reflected, are just as relevant for us today.

Two weeks ago the question addressed which narrative we allow to inform and direct us, the narrative of the Kingdom of God or the narrative of the world. Last week, the issue manifested in a recognition that to follow God faithfully, when it leads us to difficult and challenging situations, ones which cause us fear and discomfort, is to ask for help, from God and from one another. And this week, tied in with both of those dynamics, is the underlying question of, "do we trust God more than we trust our own understanding or capabilities?"

On the surface, the concern brought up to Jesus by the disciples is one of gate-keeping, making sure that they, and only they, as the chosen and proclaimed disciples of Jesus,

are the ones to ensure the ministry of Jesus. And that, in part aided by their efforts, it is only Jesus who will truly proclaim the Kingdom and the presence of God. "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he was not following us." To the disciples, and on the surface of this reading for us, the question is one of 'who is allowed to do what you, what we are doing.'

After all, given the conversation they have recently been engaged in with Jesus, it is natural that their sense of security in following Jesus has been shaken somewhat. As we've pointed out in recent weeks, they are uncomfortable, they are fearful, and they are off-balance. And in such a state, one of the surest ways to try and create for ourselves a sense of stability is by trying to exert influence or direction over someone else. Their lives have been thrown into an out-of-control state, and they are trying to insert some control of their own in response.

Which is a natural reaction. When we feel out-of-control over something in life, we tend to react by trying to exert or claim control over some other aspect of life. And the more important is the something that is outside of our control, the more strongly we react when trying to exert control in a different area.

Which brings us back to our initial question, along with a more faithful response. The question the disciples are really wrestling with is, "do we trust God?"

Do we trust God to lead the way? Do we trust God to make up the difference between what is needed and what we can offer? Do we trust God to fulfill the promises that God has made, with or without our help?

The answer to that question requires an Indiana Jones-size leap of faith.

But notice what Jesus offers in response to John's declaration that they tried to be good disciples by stopping someone else's ministries. Instead of responding with, "oh, thank you," or "yes, that was the right thing," Jesus instead says... 'don't worry about them, or what they proclaim.'

This echoes, and perhaps was even influenced by Moses' response in a similar situation.

Moses could have been listening to the sermon last week, as well (though truthfully, the sermon last week was somewhat influenced by Moses). But Moses knows he can't do it all, and that he needs help. He takes this to God, who tells him to gather seventy of the elders, and on them the Spirit of God, the spirit of leadership for the people, will fall.

But then there are two of those elders who go a little bit...rogue. Eldad and Medad continue teaching and prophesying, even when they're supposedly not supposed to, and so Joshua, who will one day succeed Moses, brings the matter up. And Moses' response, also, is 'don't worry about them, or what they're proclaiming.'

More specifically, Moses says, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put the Spirit on them!"

In short, how great it would be if everyone was living up to the fullness of God's calling upon them. It's a process, it will always be a process, but how great will it be when everyone is engaged and participating, fully and comprehensively.

The Reformers of the Protestant movement in the 16th century had an understanding of the Church, that it was made up of "the priesthood of all believers." In response to the Roman Catholic view that only the ordained and sanctioned priest could intercede with God, could speak with God, could interpret God, the Reformers - Luther, Calvin, Knox, Wesley - believed that every baptized person in the congregation could do those things. Furthermore, every baptized person could minister to the church and the community in God's name. And even more so, they believed, in the "priesthood of all believers," that every person had a calling and commission to serve God and the community in particular and unique ways. Rather than exert and solidify control in a few specific people, they lost go of earthly control to allow God's leading and spirit to hold sway.

Recently, I heard a little-known and overrated NFL quarterback comment that, in the offense he plays for, "everyone eats." Meaning, essentially, everyone is involved. Everyone is engaged. Everyone contributes. And the overall goal, the overall outcome, is what matters more than just the individual - the mission is greater than the individual.

That's the concept at play here, as well. In our reading of Moses and Joshua, where Moses lifts up the ministry of God over his own personal acclaim. In our reading of Jesus and the disciples, where Jesus reminds the disciples that the proclamation of the Kingdom is what is truly important and not whose voice or group it is coming from. The ministry is what is important.

It matters more that God's Word, God's kingdom, God's presence is being proclaimed and lived out than it does who is doing the proclaiming. And in order to get on that page, we have to answer, for ourselves, the same question the disciples needed to face, that Joshua needed to face: "do we trust God, and God's plan?"

Because if we don't, then we are always going to try and control who does what and in what manner. But if we do, then we are always going to find that what we imagined is only the tip of the iceberg of the Kingdom that will be realized. When we trust God, the ministries and mission engagements we plan will show us greater effect than we could have imagined.

You are called to that; we each are. Frederick Buechner writes, "the place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." Everybody eats. In this, do we trust God, to lead us and show us the way? Do we trust God, to follow where we are led, into new and sometimes challenging ventures? Do we trust God to hold us and keep us, to equip us and send us?

I believe the answer to those questions is, "yes." I believe that we trust, and that we are committed to faithfully following, putting the gospel ministry of the Kingdom first and foremost. I believe in us and this congregation as a part of the priesthood of all believers. And I believe that there are exciting and wonderful things ahead of us. I am glad to be in such a position with all of you in this time and place. I am especially glad for our common calling. Amen.

*(Sermon preached by Rev. Jason Cashing at Clarence Presbyterian Church)*