

Sermon - September 13, 2009

## **Ready, Set, Go - For Good and For God**

Proverbs 1:20-33 Mark 8:27-38

Marjorie read the words... I will make my words known to you, those who listen to me will be secure...

I wonder – don't you? - And behavioral scientists wonder, too, why we human beings do the things we do. What guides us in making our decisions? What reasons can we give; do we give, for the actions we take? The ways we spend our time and our money?

If you took a walk through your checkbook, or your credit card statement, beyond the necessities - could you say why you spend what you spent? If you had a CPA – A Christian Public Accountant - would our answers, our reasons for our actions – measure up?

Would we be able to pass the test of being a Christian – a follower of Jesus, one who heard God's word and listened to it? If there were a check up – like those truck weigh stations I saw so many of the past several weeks of travel - would we be found to be on the right road of life and with the right load for good living?

And would it be a comfort and strength and help to us in hard times to know we are more often than not making good use of the precious gift of life we've been given?

It does matter, doesn't it, what it is we choose to do with our lives, day by day by day? Every new day does say to us – Ready, Set, Go! But at the end of the day it will matter, won't it, if what we did or said counted for good and for God, or not.

Let us pray....

Lord of life, and of the lives we live this day, may the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of these your faithful and loving people, be acceptable in your sight, and your good word to us this day in Christ. Amen.

I will make my word known to you – those who listen to me will be secure. Abraham and Moses. Job and Jonah. Deborah and Priscilla. Mary and Martha, Peter and Paul. All - found comfort and strength in their lives – because – over and over and over again they tried to listen to and to trust God's word, and to let the word help guide the way they lived.

I suspect – as much as anything else – it was my experience of this truth in my life that was God's way of leading me into the ministry. As a kid, and then as a teen-ager, I kept finding out over and over and over again, that almost all the trouble I would get into - and my Mom could tell you with some detail what some of those troubles were - but I don't think she will -

For that is part of the terror and joy of being a parent - the trouble your kids get into become your troubles, too. So I think my secrets are safe with my mom.

But I kept finding out that the troubles I'd get into were almost always because I did not listen to or obey my parents, and, more telling, some parts of God's word to me. In some ways I was, and am still, like Peter. Jesus asks the question – who do you say that I am. And Peter gives the right answer – he seems to have gotten it. You are the messiah, he said.

And – then – almost in the same breath – Peter picks a fight with the man he just said was the messiah, the Son of God, God with us.

In a way what Peter did was the act of a child. A parent tells a child the right thing to do – and – stubborn – the child does almost the exact opposite thing – what the parent said not to do. And the parent wants to say - probably does say - Did you hear what I said? Did you? That was God's question to us all in Proverbs. I gave you my word – did you hear it?

And sure enough, this pattern will happen again – we hear and do not obey. And so the instructions need to be given again and again and again. And the pain of wrong and not good decisions will need to be addressed in our lives, with comfort and care that will need to be given. And - God's word needs to be spoken -in words and deeds - more and more. We need to hear all that is good and worthy and true for us to do. God's word of instruction, and God's word of judgment, forgiveness and grace.

And that, I guess, is what I have thought ministry is all about - preaching the truth of God's word in Christ - And then - believing the preacher is called to provide comfort and encouragement and help to persons who discover the cost of disobedience - and the comfort of faithfulness.

It's really what this is all about – this Church stuff we are part of. It's about us hearing God's word – over and over again, finding strength and encouragement and comfort and direction in it and from it.

But I confess I have always struggled with Jesus' words about the cross. The words sound so negative, a call to pain and suffering - if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

That sounds pretty heavy, indeed. Dangerous. Deadly. A rather discouraging word. Akaloo - follow in such a hard way.

But the more I've lived, the more of life and the struggles I see people having in their lives, I've come to hear Jesus words in a different way – in a more positive light.

The truth is, I think that Jesus is calling us to a life of challenge, yes, but also of the deepest satisfaction there can be in life. Let them deny themselves – yes – of course. If you and I focus

on our problems, our concerns, even on our pains and troubles – We can only end up with very self-centered and unhappy lives.

3

You know too many people who are self-absorbed with their own problems, and so have no energy or ability to see the troubles of others - or to see the wonders of the world in which we all live, or to appreciate and respond to the promise in Jesus' words.

Jesus' call is to live up and out of ourselves into the wonder and possibilities of the world around us. Yes, please, let's get beyond ourselves and a preoccupation with just our own concerns. Lift up your heads and see the wonder of life everywhere. Live in hope.

And, that second command of Jesus – take up your cross. Yes, of course. It's Jesus' call to us not to be pinned down in life, trapped by the troubles we may be dealing with. Is there energy and effort needed to pick up the burdens in our lives? Yes certainly.

But what joy and wonder and achievement and success we give up when we give up. Pick up your burdens, your troubles, and keep on living – keep on moving forward in life. You've heard the stories; you've met some people who've done just this. Picked up very heavy crosses, indeed. In some ways I suspect every one of you has done it in your life, is doing it now.

Friday we marked another anniversary of the 911 attacks on our country, and remembered the horrendous results in the lives of so many people. And we heard again stories of heroism, and new stories of how people have vowed to make something positive be the result of that horrible event. People that day did some remarkable things. They denied themselves, picked up the cross, the burden that was given them by the circumstances, and did heroic things.

And survivors and family members have kept on doing this ever since. Not weighted down and stuck in life by that tragic day, but motivated to make something good of something very bad. That's Jesus' call. That's all. It's not a call to life defeating joy-denying misery. It's a call to live life fully, in light of its future hope and not its troubled past.

You know people who are stuck in life, who cannot move past some painful and even tragic event in their lives. Their crosses have then weighed down. And you know others, I suspect, and many of you are in that number, who have picked up whatever the cross is, something you did, or that happened to you, and you've moved forward with your life.

That's Jesus' call - ready to face the issue, set to pick up the burden with strength that God provides. Be prepared to go forward into life, to make the best of things.

Paul said it - I can do all things through him who strengthens me. It is the heart of the New Hope Grief Ministry - the Grief workshop that our Church will again help to host – and that the Matthews discovered and have helped others discover.

Life, the fullest richest possible life for us – and for those who know us, is to find the strength in our faith to pick up our crosses and move on in our lives out of the past into the future.

4

Deny yourself. Pick up your cross. And follow me. Three steps to the Christian life. None easy. But each, with an effort to take them, to live forward in hope, following Jesus, is our hope.

Akaloo is the word. Follow. And we're using this fall as a way of calling new attention to the central call of Jesus to us all – to follow him. Why not? He is the Lord and Savior.

Yes – his way led to a cross – and - to glory... Thru this life-to-life eternal. And the truth is that we will all suffer and die. But if we choose to follow Jesus, his way of compassion and care, of service to others, of speaking truth to injustice and corruption and immorality, - his way, this way, Christ's way, leads to eternal life.

Akaloo – come follow me. That's Jesus call. It's what we strive to teach our children and youth, and this year – we hope more and more of us older kids – in our 30's, and 40's and 50's and 60's +, will be a more active part of the adventure of following Jesus.

Every Wednesday night – beginning Sept. 23

And / Or - the other opportunities to make your life, your living, count for good and for God. Through the study and service opportunities that your Church offers.

And - or - to see more clearly ways you can live in more Christ like ways in the places you work, or are active in the community, or in your family.

Who do you say that I am, is Jesus' question. And if our answer is – the Messiah – the Son of God, why would we not want to follow him? To see beyond ourselves, to pick up whatever our crosses are, and to keep following Jesus - his way, his truth, his love - all the way home.

Amen.

David W. Robertson, Pastor