

Dangerous Sauntering

Isaiah 43:1-7

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Welcome to our second “sauntering Sunday”. Today is about Dangerous Sauntering.

Our lectionary for today is focused on the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, specifically His baptism. This is the story we read every year on this first Sunday after Epiphany. We have jumped from the “infant Jesus, meek and mild” to this introduction by John:

¹⁶ John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Unquenchable fire. Nice warm, fuzzy image you’ve got for us there, John. We could always count on John to help us feel better about ourselves! However, we don’t want to get distracted, so let’s read on:

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Let’s stop there for a minute. Did you ever wonder WHAT Jesus’ reaction to that “bird” was? Was He like, “Thanks, Dad” having known this was going to happen and it was a show for the people...OR...was it as much a surprise to Him as to those around Him? Was His reaction more like, “OMG! Eh, OMD!” (Oh, My, Dad!) and the reality sank in that the waiting was over, and the mission and ministry had just begun? Was it an “aha!” moment?

Personally, I suspect it was more of the latter than the former...The fully human Jesus just bumped into the fully divine Christ. I suspect it left bruises.

But, no matter WHAT happened, we can agree that the world changed, that HIS world changed. It may not be quite so dramatic, but we risk change when we undertake the challenge of sauntering; because sauntering can always be dangerous.

We take a risk every time we saunter. Call it “awakened” or “mindful” or “noticing” any one of a host of other terms, the very act of risking to saunter can and will be dangerous...it will change your life.

(For a quick review, last week we talked about the idea of “sauntering”:
“Saunter” is a medieval term that comes from the words à la Saint[e] Terre, a way of describing pilgrims on their way to the Holy Land...those people on a Holy Pilgrimage. ‘There goes a Sainte Terrer’. A Holy Lander.” Someone on a Holy Pilgrimage. A Saunterer.)

I also identified a number of cages that can trap the unwary saunterer along the way. Cages like responsibility, routine, assumptions, guilt, failure and fear.

This day of baptism was the day Jesus burst forth from His cage. It’s about time we saunterers began to break apart the cages that hold us as well. However, I’m serious...this is the beginning of a dangerous journey. Once undertaken, sauntering will change you forever!

Let’s begin.

Do you know how you want to die? Now I could make that theme alone an entire sermon, but for the moment, let’s agree that we would all like to die doing the thing we love. Life is too precious for anything else: Not simply dwindling off until we wake up dead!

I’m convinced that your date of death is NOT the date carved on your tombstone. Most people die long before that. We start dying when we have nothing worth living for...and we don’t really start living until we find something worth dying for. Ironic, isn’t it? Finding our passion, something worth dying for is what makes life worth living.

Maybe that explains why Jesus was so full of life. He has so much, so many to die for. I wonder how we managed to get the message backwards. With that idea in mind, let me offer you the first key to breaking out of the cages that will stop the saunterer...Responsible irresponsibility.

Don’t get me wrong; you need to take care of responsibilities like paying bills and taking out the garbage, but your greatest responsibility is pursuing God-ordained passions. And if you let the lesser, day-to-day responsibilities take over, you are practicing irresponsible responsibility. Why is this important?

We find it all too easy to turn our responsibilities into excuses. At that point, our responsibilities become irresponsible. Our responsibilities become the cage that keeps us from the path of the Saunterer. Do you remember the young man that wanted to respond to Jesus' call? His response, "First I must go bury..." The barrier wasn't about burying...it was about the cage of responsibility.

There is within you a God ordained passion that is yours and yours alone. It is YOUR path of gladness, of lightness, of joy. It fulfills you and puts you on the path of sauntering. Pursuing any other path is simply walking around in the cage. You can pray about it and you SHOULD pray about it, until that becomes the very routine that holds you in the cage.

Let me give you a practical example:

You are all aware of the epidemic of shootings, especially school shootings that has taken place in the US. It makes no one happy. The general response is always something about "thoughts and prayers". Those are "nice" words. But there comes a time to quit praying. Sometimes, for the passion of your God-ordained calling, you need to quit praying and start acting. Oh, yes, continue to wrap your sauntering in prayer, but make the jump, take the risk, quit dumping the problems on God if you're not willing to be an active part of the solution.

Sometimes the most faithful response to God in our prayer life is NOT prayer, but to fill out the application, make the call, transfer the money, have the conversation, make the appointment. One of our biggest mistakes is in asking God to do for us what God wants us to do for Him. We get the portfolios backward! Get it right and the cage door will open. Sometimes we simply have to take the risk of being responsibly irresponsible.

And what about the cage of "routine"? Now this one is subtle.

Have you ever been going from one place to another, perhaps home to school or work and arrived not remembering the journey? I remember once in my university days...I loved walking across campus, the area called "the Hill" which had a great view down to the Mississippi river. In the autumn as the leaves would change, it was stunning.

One year, in the midst of classes and papers and rehearsals, as I crossed the Hill I was stunned to look down toward the river, through the bare limbs of the trees. The leaves had turned and were gone! And even though I walked that path almost every day, I had missed them.

You see, one part of this cage of the ordinary, of the routine is inattentional blindness. We look but we do not see the world of God around us. It's not always that way: Every once-in-a-while we are stunned by the world around us. Maybe it was the beauty of the ocean side or the mountaintop when time seems to slow, and we become hypersensitive to all the world around us. We are experiencing, standing on the path of sauntering.

That moment is engraved in our memory, we will cherish it forever, but then we get back into the routine of life and the cataracts of the habitual cloud our vision.

Have you ever had your own epiphany moment? I'm sure you have; A moment when God unexpectedly and unforgettably invaded the predictability of your life? Celtic Christians called these moments, the moments where heaven and earth seem to touch, *thin places*. This is where creation meets Creator. Where sin meets Grace. Where the cage door cracks open and the path of the saunterer breaks off from the path of routine.

Let's go off on a tangent (You know I love to do that!) and talk about Moses. You know the story, but for the moment, I want to ask one question: Why a burning bush? You know the story, Moses encounters God in a burning bush. But why? The most common answer is that it was God's way of showing that there is no place where God is not. By picking one of the least likely places and methods, God made a bold statement. One name for God in rabbinical literature is "The Place". God is here. God is there. God is everywhere.

Do you get that? It doesn't matter where you are...sitting at your desk, lounging on the sofa watching football, God can show up anytime, anyplace.

So, Moses is wandering along and is interrupted by God. "Take off your sandals" ...for this is Holy Ground. Why that place? It's because that is where God was. It was not that the place was holy to attract God, it was that God's presence MADE the place Holy!

What does that mean for you? Don't wait to worship God until you get to the Promised Land, whatever you think it is! THIS is the Holy Ground; you've got to worship along the way. This is the Holy moment. You need to be awake, mindful, if you will, of the moment to be able to live in the moment. It's the way of sauntering; being open to the experience of "Being".

Now, back to our sauntering.

We break the door of the cage of the ordinary by learning to see, to experience, to be in the moment. It's only then that we can begin to encounter God. And it's not new.

At the Baptism of the Lord, LOTS of people had be dunked by John. It was important, thrilling, exciting, but it was becoming ordinary...until a sign and a voice broke through the ordinary, shattering the inattentional blindness. The world would never be the same. Something happened to demand our attention.

So, if the key to breaking the cage of responsibility is responsible irresponsibility, what, then, is the key to breaking free from the routine, the ordinary?

Why, change, of course. Would you like it in a short, pithy saying?

Change of place + change of pace = change of perspective.

That's one reason why retreats, camps and mission trips are so powerful; they allow us the chance to break free from the inattentional blindness that otherwise threatens to surround us. But it doesn't have to be big to be lifechanging.

Could God have spoken to Moses somewhere else? Of course...but the burning bush brought about a change of place (expectations) and a change of pace bringing about a change of his perspective.

Was Jesus' baptism the only place God could pronounce Jesus as Son and Himself as well pleased? Not at all. But it was a different place and the people were moving at a different pace and that allowed for all to experience a different perspective.

If you want to come out of the cage of routine, mindfully, intentionally change something. Change your routine. Volunteer at the homeless shelter. Start keeping a gratitude journal. Get plugged in to a Bible Study. Take a day off and do a personal retreat. Explore the Spiritual Disciplines by intentionally trying meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance or celebration.

Even the smallest changes in routine can result in radical changes in life. Sometimes it's as simple as choosing which path; the path of responsibility, the path of routine...

Or the path of the saunterer?