

**Sauntering Beyond the Cages**  
**1 Corinthian 12:1-11**                      **John 2:1-11**

For the last two weeks I have been sharing with you my thoughts about the holy call of sauntering.

First, a brief review of this critical word, just in case you missed it before:  
*“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 Terror’. A Holy Lander.” Someone on a Holy Pilgrimage. A saunterer.*

That’s the job we have been assigned...to be “Holy Landers”, sauntering through our lives, growing into our faith.

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. Each one of those can prevent us from our sauntering, from responding to God’s call in our lives.

The first week I introduced the concept of the saunter. Last week I spoke about the cages of responsibility and routine, cages that can be visible and obvious or so subtle that we don’t even realize we are in a cage.

Today, let’s take on two more of these cages...the barriers WE place between us and our encounter with God; the cages of assumptions and guilt.

Let’s begin by turning once again to Søren Kierkegaard:  
*“If I were to wish for anything I should not wish for wealth and power, but for the passionate sense of what can be, for the eye which, ever young and ardent, sees the possible. Pleasure disappoints, possibility never. And what wine is so sparkling, what so fragrant, what so intoxicating as possibility.”*

What a great motto for the saunterer!

Our problem is, of course, we find ourselves afraid of possibility. We learn early and hear often people who will make fun of our dreams and we learn first, not to share those dreams and, shortly thereafter, not to dream. It can’t happen, it’s impossible, it’s a waste of time.

There are a couple of problems here, so let's unpack this deadly cage and see what is really behind this cage of assumptions.

Do you remember the story of Abraham? God spoke to Abraham and told him that he would have many, many offspring. To say Abraham wasn't convinced is an understatement, so: *"God took Abraham outside and said, 'Look up as the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.' Then He said to him, 'So shall your offspring be'.*

The promise and fulfillment of God's promise is the critical part, however did you notice what happened first? God took Abraham outside the tent to encounter the heavens. The tent was where Abraham lived...it was his life, his doubts, his assumptions. To make Abraham understand, God first took him outside, where there was no ceiling to interfere.

We call it "growing up" when we learn to build the cage of assumptions all around us. And, boy, are we good builders! These walls are solid, and the ceiling is low...low enough to block out any uncomfortable things in life...like, perhaps the Word of God.

These walls have lots of names; bigotry, prejudice, exclusion, doubt, fear, depression, resignation, avoidance, ambition...it's really a long list. We don't like or are afraid of others because they are black or white or brown or red or have round eyes, or slanty eyes or wear too little clothing or wear too much clothing or wear the wrong kind of clothing or.... Heavens, I'm getting tired just making the list! Yet how can we do that, make that kind of list if we believe that God created human kind...ALL human kind in HIS image? Well, maybe that's not what the scripture REALLY meant. Or something like that. But the one thing they, all these walls, have in common is that they are assumptions...and are our means of turning our back on God.

American author Samuel Longhorn Clemens, better known as Mark Twain was known for his biting humor and dry wit. He found a different way of expressing this idea of assumptions: *"God created man in his own image and man, being a gentleman, returned the favor."* And we do that, you know, of course we do.

Call it naturalism. Call it anthropomorphism. Call it idolatry. Call it what you will. The result of this spiritual inversion is a god who is about our size and looks an awful lot like us. I suspect most of our spiritual shortcomings stem from this fundamental mistake: Thinking about God in human terms.

When we make God in our image, we're left with a god who can never surprise us, never overwhelm us, not astonish us, not transcend us.

That way it's not surprising when we expect disappointment and manage to find it. When we build our cages strong and true and build our little god in with us, what else is there? Of course, a corollary of this is that once we shut out God, the real, great, Creator, then it's not surprising that we can make our own assumptions come true.

Quick tangent (you knew there had to be at least one, right?). If you moved to a new community, and the people there stared at you, whispered about you (or talked out loud about you), refused you even common courtesy, made it clear you were NOT welcome, how would you feel? Really. How would that feel?

Now think about what it must be like to be a refugee in today's world, caged in by the assumptions of "good Christian folk".

Sometimes we need to be brought up short, to be forced to confront our own assumptions:

The year was 1878. The place was Westfield College in Illinois. It was during an annual Church conference that the president of the college prophetically said, "We are approaching a time of great invention. For example, I believe the day is not far off when men will fly through the air like birds."

One bishop accused the college president of heresy and sought to have him removed from office and forced from the church. "The Bible tells us that flight is reserved for the angels!"

The bishop's name? Wright. His two sons, Orville and Wilbur, recorded the first successful powered flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina on December 17, 1903.

One cage of assumptions broken, somewhat painfully.

If we can just get our assumptions out of the way, I believe that God is ready to use us, sometimes before we feel like we're ready. Of course, I'm not really sure what "ready" means.

Remember our Gospel reading for today...the familiar story of the wedding feast. Jesus' first miracle. I'm not sure Jesus, the human Jesus, was ready to make the transition from carpentry to ministry. Remember what He said? "My time has not yet come". Was that hesitation I heard? Did Jesus feel like He wasn't quite ready, that this wasn't quite the right time?

I get it, boy do I get it! It took a little prompting from His mother to get Jesus to overcome His human hesitation and step into His divine calling.

There's another assumption...I'm not ready. I don't know about you, but I have almost NEVER been ready. I wasn't ready to get married. I wasn't ready to have kids. I wasn't ready to take the burden of pastoral ministry...the list goes on and on. Friends, we're NEVER ready! Once we realize that, we can either flee to the safety of the cage of assumptions or throw wide the door to dare to encounter God and God's calling.

And, of course, there is the assumption that is simply "I can't". I'm too young (remember David)? I'm too old (what about Abraham)? I can't speak well in public (ever hear of Moses)? I don't have the ability. I don't have ANY special ability.

Hmmm...remember our Epistle lesson for today? Do you remember the thrust of it? It shows up in verse 7: "*Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good*". Notice what it DOESN'T say? To SOME people. To THE BEST people. To the MOST FAITHFUL people. Nope. It says **to each one**...you, me, everyone in this room, everyone who is a member of the Body of Christ. You have been given a Gift of the Spirit to be used for the common good.

Well, you can trust your assumptions that you don't have a special gift, you don't have anything to offer, you don't have...Or you can break out of the cage, trusting God. God has promised you Spiritual Gifts, but they won't fit in the cage.

But there is still another cage holding us in, keeping us from our holy saunter. This is a cage called guilt. Now, contrary to what makes sense, most of us LIKE guilt! No, really!

There is a cute/sad cartoon that has a man, laying on a new bed and the bed is whispering things like, “remember when you dropped the good dish”, “remember when you crashed the car”, “remember when you cheated on the test”? The caption of the cartoon reads, “It wasn’t long before Harry regretted his new memory foam mattress.”

I say we like guilt because that’s what we relive in the dark of the night. Not the good times, not the victories. It is there, in the quiet that the seeds of guilt, so carefully planted, have the chance to grow.

We don’t have enough time this morning to explore this as it deserves, but let’s at least get the basics.

When we sin, guilt is a healthy and holy reflex. Thank God for the conviction of the Holy Spirit that drives us to repentance. God WILL forgive, but only after repentance. The moment we confess our sin to God, our sin is forgiven and forgotten. But for most of us, it is far easier to accept God’s forgiveness than it is to forgive ourselves.

I can’t tell you the number of people over the years I have known and sometimes counseled who struggled to forgive themselves. Unfortunately, it happens to many good people. They become fixated on past mistakes that they forfeit future opportunities. If we don’t crawl, scrape, or burst from this cage of guilt, if we don’t allow the grace of God to saturate and sanctify our sinful memories, we remain lost in this cage of our own building.

Some people I know mistakenly think that our mistakes disqualify us from being used by God. And so they quietly shuffle back into the cage and pull the door closed. But that’s as silly as deciding that you’re sick and waiting until you get well before going to the doctor!

Friends, you will NEVER get out of this cage until you get past the doorway of guilt. The Good News is that there is forgiveness and freedom because of what Christ accomplished on the cross. And if, no, and when you receive His grace, it will transform your life.

Not sure how you’re doing with this whole “guilt” thing? C.S. Lewis wrote, “When a man is getting better, he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still left in him. When a man is getting worse, he understands his own badness less and less.”

Jesus understood and not only showed us the power of forgiveness and self-forgiveness, but a bit of Pavlovian conditioning along the way.

You know the story: At the Last Supper Peter proclaims that is he faithful and will never deny Jesus. Jesus tells him that before the rooster crows Peter will deny him three times. And of course, that is exactly what happens.

A servant girl said, "This man was with him". Nope, not me.

A little later someone else said, "You have to be with him, you're a Galilean".

Un huh. That wasn't me.

Still later; "Certainly this fellow was with him!" Man, I don't know what you are talking about!

And then the rooster crowed. And Peter wept bitterly.

We sin, we fail, we simply mess up, big time. And God understands and, once we repent, God forgives. But WE need to learn to accept forgiveness and forgive ourselves as well.

Do you remember the rest of that story arch about Peter? Peter had been living with the guilt of his denial when we have the encounter with post-Resurrection Jesus. This was no coincidence.

Jesus asked Peter, "do you love me?" Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. "Feed my lambs"

Jesus asked Peter again, "do you truly love me?" Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. "Take care of my sheep".

And a third time, "do you love me?" And Peter was hurt, but answered, You know all things, you know I love you! "Feed my sheep".

I don't think it's any coincidence that Jesus asked Peter the same question three times. Why? Peter failed three times; Jesus just recommissioned him three times. But that's not all. Have you ever notice WHEN this story took place? "Early in the morning" ...or about the time the rooster crows.

From that time on, for the rest of Peter's life, the sound of the rooster crowing was NOT the sound of denial and guilt, but the sweet recognition of forgiveness...and gratitude.

Ultimately, the Grace of God is the difference between drowning in guilt and swimming in gratitude.

Once you figure that out, the cage of guilt will fall to dust at your feet.