

Courageous Sauntering

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Luke 4:16-30

Well, here we are again, one last time reflecting on our journey as “Holy Landers”.

First, a brief refresher on 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, growing closer to God’s call for our lives.

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. The second 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.

The third week focused on the cages of assumptions and guilt...stuff we tend to be darn good at!

And now, today, we wrap it up with the scariest, the most dangerous of the cages: Failure and Fear. These are the cages that will cause even the most dedicated saunterer to hesitate.

So...let’s begin with failure. Personally, I hope at some time in your life, you fail. Seriously, I hope you fail, because you see failure is NOT a bad thing.

Oh, I know we are all “success” driven people...success at work, success at sports, success with spouses and/or families. We don’t like people who fail. It’s far too easy to look down on the people we see on the streets as people who have somehow failed.

And we don't like personal failure, in fact, if we would be totally candid, we are afraid of failure...sometimes to the point that the fear of failure keeps us from even making an attempt. This discussion with ourselves usually starts with words like "What if..."

However, truth be told, we usually learn more from failure than we do from success. And it is in failure that we open ourselves to the presence of God's Spirit, allowing something new to happen.

Think about it.

Sue and I just returned from spending several days on Malta. We had a great time, staying in the area known as St. Paul's Bay. Which got me thinking...how did Paul end up on Malta? It was a failure of plans, of course.

It wasn't about the captain or crew; Paul ended up on Malta because of the wind. They encountered strong head winds, making it difficult to keep the course. They faced light winds and couldn't turn the ship. They encountered gale force winds, battering the ship. It was the very failure of the voyage that put Paul EXACTLY where God wanted him to go.

The wind will be the wind. You can't stop it or keep it from blowing.

What does that remind you of? "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit". Does that sound familiar? It's from the Luke's writing known as the book of Acts.

You see, sometimes we need to failure to allow God to enter into our lives and take us where we need to be. Take it from a "professional number two"!

As some of you know, I was NOT the first choice to be your pastor here at IPC. The search committee had selected someone else. My application had failed. But cancer in a family pet changed things and, well, here I am, 13 years later.

I was not the first choice to serve as pastor in Cheyenne. However, after calling someone else, the pastor called decided he didn't like "the West" and the congregation came to me, asking me to be their pastor through a difficult time in the life of the church.

Sometimes, like Paul, we need to wind to blow us off course to allow us to find the path God has set for us.

And that means risking failure. Well, failure in the eyes of the world, at least. But the world's vision of failure and God's vision of failure are NOT the same thing!

There's a great meme making the rounds that says, in effect, "You might as well love the snow!" Why, because if you hate it, you won't have any less snow, just less happiness. Yup.

When talking about failure, George Bernard Shaw wrote, "People are always blaming circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want and if they can't find them, make them."

But it goes beyond that. You not only need to make the most of your circumstances; you also must realize that God is in them. AND that He is capable of working them together for your good. It doesn't matter how long the delay or detour. He can and WILL make them work together for good.

And that brings us, finally, to the strongest cage of all, the cage of fear.

Fear is a funny thing. It always pays compound interest on any investment. A little success feels good, but a failure weighs heavy. The next success feels good, but the next failure adds to the first and weighs twice as much. And so on and so on, until we become so burdened by fear, so afraid, that we can no longer tolerate the weight. Fear wins.

We know that, of course, and yet all too often fear takes control when we least expect it.

Most of us are far too tentative when it comes to the will of God. We let our fears dictate our decisions. We are so afraid of making the wrong decision that we make no decision, failing to realize that NO decision IS a decision. And so it is that our indecision, not our bad decisions, keep us in the cage.

In today's 21st century, first world church, we have forgotten our own history.

We have forgotten the stories of people like the “one-way missionaries” ... people who packed all they owned and purchased one-way tickets knowing they would never return.

People like A.S. Milne, who felt called to a tribe of headhunters in the New Hebrides. Other missionaries to this tribe had been martyred, but that did not stop Milne. He went, he lived among the people and he never returned.

Thirty-five years later, when the tribe buried him, they wrote this on his tombstone, “When he came there was no light. When he left there was no darkness.”

When did we start believing that God wants to send us to safe places to do easy things? God wants to send us to dangerous places to do difficult things.

I think we’ve made a false assumption about the will of God. We subconsciously think it should get easier the longer we follow Christ. And I DO think that spiritual growth gets easier with the practice of spiritual disciplines. But I also believe that spiritual growth prepares us for more dangerous missions. As we grow, God gives us more difficult things to do.

Think about it...who do you assign to the most difficult tasks? The experienced hand or the newest rookie? Rarely does the Spirit lead us down the path of least resistance! It is facing difficulties that we gain the most and grow the most.

Think about it...when you tell stories of family trips or life experiences, are the stories that come to mind first the ones where nothing in particular happened, or the ones where “Challenge” (with a capital “C”) was a part of the story line? I remember lots of camping trips with my father from when I was young but ask me about my first trips and I will tell you of snow, freezing weather, putting food in coolers to keep it from freezing and being miserable. What a GREAT memory!

Folks, sometimes we simply have to be gutsy in our lives.

Think about a monk who, on 31 October, decided to pick a fight. He had the audacity to challenge the status quo by attacking the selling of indulgences... “get of our jail free” cards for sinners. His actions ignited the Protestant Reformation. He did what he felt was right, regardless of the consequences.

Sometimes, enough is enough. You get tired of playing not to lose. You get tired of seeing a wrong perpetuated time and time and time again. You get tired of looking the other way, of maintaining the status quo.

That's the time you need to either stand up, step in or step out.

Breaking out of the cage of fear means taking risks. It means trusting the promises of God. The Bible says, "Faith is being sure what we hope for". That's a good place to start, however most of us are more sure of what we are afraid of than what we hope for.

One of the Biblical Proverbs states, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." The word "perish" here refers to fruit that is past its prime...it's rotting. We need the vision to stay fresh, to not perish, in every aspect of our lives.

We need a vision for our marriages. We need a vision for our families. We need a vision for our lives. We simply can't live by default instead of design. We can't live by fear of failure ... sometimes we simply have to overcome the fear.

Henry James wrote a story titled, "The Madonna of the Future" about an artist who devotes her entire life to a single, great painting. However, when the artist dies, it is discovered that her canvas is still blank. She never finished because she never started.

I have no idea what your "Madonna of the Future" is, but here's what I do know. You'll never finish what you never start. We crawl back into the cage of fear because, even as we despise it, because we recognize it. And that's where many of us get stuck. We fail to take the first step, so we never try to leave the cage. Instead of seeking adventure, we settle for routine. Instead of living, we survive. Instead of growing in faith, we let our fears dictate our decisions.

We are called to be saunterers. We are called to be "Holy Landers". We are called AND EQUIPPED to break free from the cages of responsibility, routine, assumptions, guilt, failure and fear. We are called and empowered to live and move and have our being as persons of Christ.

Let the journey begin!