

***“Dare Mighty Things”***  
**Reverend Bill Gause**  
**Overbrook Presbyterian Church**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent**  
**February 28, 2021**

**Scripture Reading: Mark 8:27-35**

<sup>27</sup>Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” <sup>28</sup>And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” <sup>29</sup>He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” <sup>30</sup>And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. <sup>31</sup>Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup>He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup>But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” <sup>34</sup>He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup>For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.



**Sermon: *“Dare Mighty Things”***

Last week NASA landed the Perseverance Rover on the surface of Mars. The simplicity of that sentence is sharply contrasted by the complexity of the accomplishment. It took a decade of planning, effort, and technological wizardry to make it possible. Thousands of people figured out how to build an unimaginably complex piece of equipment that could operate by itself, and then sent it sailing on top of a rocket millions of miles into space, so carefully and so precisely, that it could land softly on another world, right where it was supposed to land.<sup>1</sup>

If you’ve seen the video of that landing, then you might remember the large parachute that helped slow the descent of “Percy,”<sup>2</sup> as the rover is lovingly called by its creators. It might have looked like any other parachute, but this one featured a pattern of orange and white strips that actually spelled out a message in binary code. That message: “Dare Mighty Things.”<sup>3</sup>

It’s good to see people succeed when they attempt such great challenges. It seems too rare that we dare mighty things anymore. To the contrary, our culture seems to prefer quick and easy things. If you peruse the shelves of your local bookstore, you’re likely to find titles like *The Ultimate Guide to Meals Under 10 Minutes*,<sup>4</sup> or *The Complete 15 Minute No-Sweat Workout*,<sup>5</sup> or my favorite, *Skydiving Made Fun and Easy*!<sup>6</sup> We tend to prefer our challenges in small, manageable chunks. We like things to be quick and easy. Which may be a function of our busy schedules and competing priorities more than anything else. But in our scripture reading this morning, Jesus teaches that being a disciple is going to be neither quick nor easy.

We could be forgiven for believing otherwise. When we think of Jesus, we think of him as kind, compassionate, and loving. We remember him inviting the little children to come to him and healing sick people and eating with outcasts and making time for people that others thought were unimportant. That Jesus offers more comfort than challenge. We like that Jesus. That Jesus is easy to follow. Being a disciple of that Jesus wouldn’t be difficult at all. And there is plenty in the New Testament to foster that notion of easy discipleship.

In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus says:

<sup>28</sup>“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

In John 10, Jesus describes us as sheep and himself as the “good shepherd” and says:

*“I came that [you] may have life, and have it abundantly.”*

And of course, we remember John 3:16 where Jesus says

<sup>16</sup>“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

But then we come across passages like this one that we read today that remind us just how demanding is the life of the disciple; that being a disciple of Jesus Christ means more than just loving him and acknowledging the sacrifice he made for us.

Most people remember Peter rebuking Jesus for saying that he would suffer and die. It's a little bit understandable. Peter has just proclaimed that Jesus is the Messiah and Jesus affirmed Peter's words. Peter is confused because the Messiah shouldn't suffer, and he definitely shouldn't die. But what Peter means by "Messiah" and what Jesus means by "Messiah" are two very different things. For Peter, the Messiah is the one who will come and return Israel to international prominence. Messiah will take over where David left off, kick out the Romans, and bring in God's Kingdom, which will be a literal, earthly Kingdom, right then and there. This is the classic understanding of Messiah. Following that kind of messiah means privilege.

But for Jesus, Messiah meant something else entirely. For Jesus, the Messiah is a servant, who in grace, mercy, and steadfast love, calls the world to repent of their sins and follow God. Messiah comes to teach and heal and bridge the chasm that humanity has built between itself and God. Messiah comes to proclaim the Kingdom of God, which will not be like the Kingdoms of this world, and Messiah will die to save humanity from the power of sin and death. And to be a follower of that messiah means to join in that work of service, love, compassion, and sacrifice.

So, when Jesus rebukes Peter saying, "Get behind me Satan!" He is chastising Peter for not only his misunderstanding, but for his oversimplified, self-serving view of what it means to be a disciple. It's as if Peter is playing follow the leader, but Jesus wants him to play baseball.

Everyone knows the kid's game follow the leader. One person leads and everyone else goes exactly where they go. Peter wants to follow Jesus all the way to an earthly throne. But what Jesus has in mind is something a little more challenging, like baseball. Baseball is a team sport but there are moments when every individual has to take their turn at bat. In a baseball game, a group of people all have jobs to do and the success or failure of the whole team depends on all of them doing their jobs. It requires sacrifice, practice, resilience, and trust.

And baseball is also an excellent metaphor because it sometimes requires literal sacrifices. Sometimes you have to make an out intentionally in order to move your teammates around the bases and help them score. You sometimes have to give yourself up to help the whole team. And when you sacrifice to help the team win, you win. Which sounds a lot like losing your life to save it.

Jesus isn't promising the disciples an easy road. And he seems frustrated by Peter's failure to understand that. What Jesus does promise is that being a disciple will mean carrying a cross.

And remember, the cross was not a clean, pretty thing. We've turned it into one. Granted, it is still a symbol of our savior and our faith, but it's a pretty symbol. The cross was originally a roughhewn, instrument of execution. But it was more than a means of ending a life. There are far more efficient means of execution. The cross was also a tool of terror and intimidation. A Roman cross was, above all else, a kind of billboard carrying the message "Do Not Mess with Rome."

To be Jesus' follower meant that the disciples and all of those people gathered around him, cheering him on, hanging on every word he said, they all had to be prepared to face the same trials for which he was bound. In that time and place, the decision to follow Jesus was a serious matter. And most, if not all of the disciples, did in fact, die for what they believed. But that kind of dedication was what the early church needed if it was going to not only survive but thrive. And while it's not nearly as dangerous for us today, the decision to follow Jesus is still a serious one. And the church needs the kind of dedication Jesus is calling for still today if it is to thrive.

When we hear Jesus say "deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me" we should hear that as a call to serve and to sacrifice and to put the Kingdom of God first. We should think of the dedication of our doctors, nurses, and medical staff who put their own lives at risk to treat and comfort those who suffer from COVID-19. We should think of the EMT's and firefighters and first responders who rush into harm's way to save lives.

Because that's the kind of dedication and willingness to give everything that Jesus was talking about when he told the disciples to deny themselves, to remove themselves from the equation,<sup>7</sup> and focus on living and sharing the gospel and spreading it to all the world, no matter what it took. But times have changed, and so has the church. The church is no

longer the plucky little movement seeking to overcome the establishment. Today the church *is* the establishment. What does it mean for us to deny ourselves and take up our crosses and follow Jesus today?

Maybe it *does* mean being willing to die for what you believe, but the chances are you'll never have to do that. So, maybe it means we have to be willing to *live* for what we believe. While we can take comfort in the notion that being a Christian does not require us to sacrifice *everything*, we ought to be challenged and more than a little humbled, by the idea that being a Christian requires us to sacrifice *something*.

Maybe that means putting the needs of others first and pushing ourselves further back down the line of consideration. Maybe it means taking seriously our pledge to love and serve God... by giving generously of our time and talent and treasure; not just offering what we have left over after we've taken care of ourselves but giving of the best and the first. Maybe it means sacrificing some of our weekends and our time off to serve the people who need us most. Maybe it means putting down the TV remote and reading our Bibles a little more and praying more often. Maybe it means giving up some of the things we enjoy to spend time with people who need so very desperately to see and hear God's love in us.

And maybe taking up our cross and following Jesus means to dare mighty things. Maybe it means pushing ourselves, or allowing ourselves to be pushed, to do more and be more as Christ's disciple in this world than maybe we've ever imagined.

Maybe it means thinking bigger and being bolder than we've ever been before. Maybe it means going where we're not comfortable. Maybe it means doing something we've never attempted. Maybe it means learning a new skill that we can use in service to God through service to God's people. So many times, when I mention a possibility for mission and outreach, I have people tell me "Oh, that won't work" or they begin to tell me why it *can't* work. But what if we stopped looking for reasons why NOT to do things and started trying them? What if we put more effort into following Jesus and being his disciple than we put into our careers, or our hobbies, or our golf games?

What if we dared to do more, serve more, pray more, study more? What if we dared to dedicate our whole lives to being Christ's disciple? Not just the parts that are convenient and easy, but all of it?

That's what Jesus is saying here. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is no small endeavor. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to dare mighty things. And when you do; when you take up your cross and follow Jesus, God goes with you, giving you the strength, wisdom, and courage to carry its weight.

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it."

To God be all glory, honor, power, and dominion, in this world and in the world that is to come. Amen.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Thorbecke, Catherine. "NASA's Perseverance successfully touches down on Mars." ABC News, 19 Feb. 2021, [abcnews.go.com/Technology/nasas-perseverance-rover-attempt-ambitious-landing-mars/story?id=75931684](https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/nasas-perseverance-rover-attempt-ambitious-landing-mars/story?id=75931684).

<sup>2</sup> "NOVA." 1 Mar. 2021, [www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/nasa-perseverance-mars-rover-landing-success](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/nasa-perseverance-mars-rover-landing-success).

<sup>3</sup> Associated Press. "Mars rover's giant parachute carried a secret message." Washington Post, 24 Feb. 2021, [www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/kidspost/mars-rovers-giant-parachute-carried-secret-message/2021/02/24/0103b276-6765-11eb-8468-21bc48f07fe5\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/kidspost/mars-rovers-giant-parachute-carried-secret-message/2021/02/24/0103b276-6765-11eb-8468-21bc48f07fe5_story.html).

<sup>4</sup> Barnes & Noble. The Ultimate Guide to Meals Under 10 Minutes | Paperback. [www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-ultimate-guide-to-meals-under-10-minutes-emily-simmons/1131298544?ean=9781386241089](https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-ultimate-guide-to-meals-under-10-minutes-emily-simmons/1131298544?ean=9781386241089).

<sup>5</sup> Barnes & Noble. Quick Fit: The Complete 15-Minute No-Sweat Workout | Paperback. [www.barnesandnoble.com/w/quick-fit-richard-bradley/1103852346?ean=9780743471039](https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/quick-fit-richard-bradley/1103852346?ean=9780743471039).

<sup>6</sup> Buchanan, Tom. JUMP! : Skydiving Made Fun & Easy. McGraw-Hill Professional, 2003, [www.amazon.com/JUMP-Skydiving-Made-Fun-Easy/dp/0071410686](https://www.amazon.com/JUMP-Skydiving-Made-Fun-Easy/dp/0071410686).

<sup>7</sup> Ringe, Sharon. "Mark 8:27-38, Exegetical Perspective." *Feasting on the Word. Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary. Year B, Volume 4*. Ed. David Lyon Bartlett and Barbara Brown. Taylor. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008. 73. Print.