

Sermon Text for February 11, 2018

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

II Kings 2:1-12, Mark 9:2-9

“A change in plans”

You may not have realized it but when you stepped into this church this morning you began a journey which will take you all the way to April Fools Day. It will take you all the way to Easter. No, today is the beginning of Lent, but it is the end of our time with Romans for quite some time as move away from Paul’s writings and focus in on a Gospel which I have not covered much at all in my time here. We are going to focus in on the Gospel of Mark which is the shortest Gospel and the one that people say is the earliest one written. Much of what we find in the other Gospels is thought to be taken from Mark, or at least the author of Mark was the first to record the life of Jesus.

So in this journey that we are beginning today, which isn’t quite lent, we will find ourselves on Tuesday, in just a couple days, finishing our 50 Day Challenge as we have read through now all of the New Testament together, and finished Genesis in these last 50 days. A church that reads Scripture together is going to understand more what the will of God is for their family. This lent we will find out how to value the presence of Jesus even more than ever. As we finish this one challenge, we are going to begin another challenge which I know may only impact a certain percentage of you. We are going to begin next Sunday what we are coning as: #devicefreelent. I’ll have more of that for you next week. But just a warning, get in all of your Candy Crush, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter and any other activities which are not job related or essential out of the way this week, because beginning next week you are going to go silent. It’s for your own good.

This isn’t a public safety announcement, but I began training again after taking off about a year and a half. I’m running the Garden Spot Half Marathon and I was out yesterday morning running down Bunker Hill road in the daylight and I see a car coming toward me and it isn’t really giving me much room, and there isn’t that much room there either, and as it gets closer to me I notice that he is on his phone, I stepped into the ditch and I don’t know if he ever saw me or not. So devicefree lent is primarily about giving Jesus our undivided attention, but it just might save your pastor’s life as well.

But today, we see that Jesus is transfigured, it is Transfiguration Sunday, and the Scripture that I am reading speaks about the event that is called the transfiguration and hopefully

you will hear and understand why it is called that. But the impact that Jesus' transfiguration had on Peter and the other disciples was not insignificant. It created a reality where Peter was faced with an inevitable change in plans. He thought he had everything planned out exactly as it was supposed to be, but God put a detour in his plans, told him to go the other way. How do we react when we are faced with a change in our life plans?

Today, we are told to listen, to focus on Jesus, to put away our preconceived solutions and look for God's plan in the midst of a cloud. Let's read our Scripture.

READ SCRIPTURE

The transfiguration doesn't tend to make our top ten moments in Jesus' life, but it should. The birth, the resurrection, the miracles, they all seem to carry a little more weight as we think about Jesus than does the transfiguration. But it is a crucial event in the life and times of Jesus and his disciples. Let's set the stage a little and we have to look at the relationship between Jesus and Peter, because it is Peter in this Scripture whose plans get changed. Go back to chapter 8 and look specifically at vs.29 where we see Peter respond to Jesus' question: who do you say that I am? And Peter is the only one who responds correctly when he states: You are the Messiah. So Peter isn't always a complete failure. He gets things right every now and then.

But then skip to vs.33 and we see Jesus address Peter and he says: Get behind me Satan. For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." This chastisement, this rebuke by Jesus is quite different from his response to Peter's answer before. What happened? Well, Jesus was laying out to the disciples the plans that God had in place for what was going to happen with Jesus. Look at vs.31, he began to teach them what he had to go through. But Peter, didn't like those plans, he had other plans for Jesus, and especially that part about him getting killed. So he rebukes Jesus in vs.32, and that's when Jesus goes off on him.

So we know already before this Scripture in chapter 9 that the plans that Peter has for Jesus, and the plans that Jesus has for himself are quite different. In fact, we know that Peter's plans were a result of him setting his mind on human things and not on divine things. Peter's plans were not reflective of God's plans. We get that. Now let's go to chapter 9 with that thought in mind, also as we think about our own plans in life, what are they? Are they human plans or are they divine, are they what God wants for us in life?

We'll get there. Jesus calls Peter, James, and John to go with him up a mountain. Now, that is quite a request. We see Jesus often go up a mountain by himself to pray, so to be invited, this is quite a privileged position. Peter may be thinking, maybe he forgot my bonehead comment about his plans being really poorly thought out. Okay, I'm back on his good side, just

like I was when I called him the Messiah. He really liked that. It was just Jesus and these three disciples walking up a mountain when all of a sudden his clothes become dazzling white. The event was absolutely breathtaking. The whiteness of Jesus' clothing is not unprecedented in Scripture. We see Daniel speak about the Son of Man whose appearance becomes dazzling white. We read about Moses who has a similar occurrence when he is on the mountain speaking with God.

But for Jesus, this dazzling white clothing would have been a reflection and a reminder of what he had rebuked Peter for in the past. The white clothing have always symbolized martyrdom for the people of faith both Jewish and Christian. All throughout Scripture we see those who are wearing white are those who are persecuted and killed for the faith, so when the disciples see Jesus in this light, they should think about what he had said earlier that he was going to suffer and die and be raised again. You know, that part that Peter really didn't like, that part that didn't really fit into Peter's plans.

But now not only does Jesus' clothing turn white, but Moses and Elijah show up and we hear that they talking with Jesus. Things have gotten more than incredible, they have gotten to the point where Peter and the disciples have to realize that something is happening that is supposed to be life changing and it is supposed to make them focus not on earthly things, but heavenly things. Peter is euphoric, but vs.6 also tells us that he was terrified. We don't hear that until after he comes up with another bonehead plan to build little cabins so that Elijah and Moses and Jesus can hang out and not worry about the inclement weather. We could also have you here whenever we want so that if we wanted some insight or some deep thoughts we could just come back here and know that you'd be living here. Let's build some booths.

When Elisha in our earlier Scripture had his plans to follow Elijah everywhere he went, there were people of God who were trying to speak sense to him and his response three times is be silent, I know what I am doing. Elisha had his plan and nothing or no one was going to sway him from that plan, even if they were a whole host of people who were sent by God. Likewise, Peter was terrified, he didn't know what to say or think, so his mouth started working before his mind did, and his mouth showed that he still had his mind on earthly things. Let's keep you here on this earth. His plans were still plans that focused solely on his life here on this earth and his desires, and his hopes and dreams. Not that which God had for him.

You can cut him a break because he was terrified because this was not part of his plan. The young couples Sunday School class is studying Tony Evans' series called Detours. He speaks about detours in life being those times when our plans and God's plans don't necessarily

match up and so God sends us on a detour in order for us to learn and in order for us to get to our destination better equipped than we were before we had that detour. A change in our plans is often for the purpose of teaching us something that God needs us to understand. What kind of detours have you had in your life? What kind of change in plans did you have in your life? Our plan was to serve in Italy for 7 years and then serve in China for the rest of our life. That was our plan when we graduated from seminary. Praise be to God that His plans were for our good and for the good of His kingdom.

What about you. What change in plans have happened in your life? Maybe you were planning on studying to be a nurse and at the first sight of blood you fainted, nope, that isn't for me? Maybe you were planning on having children that didn't happen but you spent your life as a father or a mother to more children than you can count. Maybe you were planning on buying a house and things didn't just work out that way. Maybe you were hoping to be happily married for the rest of your life. Maybe you were hoping that your kids would be like every other kid. What change in plans have you had in your life?

I can tell you that in vs.7 we are given the first step of the process, the first step of the journey when there is a change in plans. Right after Peter's proclamation a dark cloud appears and a voice from God says: Listen to him. God's response to Peter's reaction to his fear and his plans made out of fear, is: listen to him. First Presbyterian consistently has plans changed. This past week when we heard about Tim's resignation and move from music maker to house parent at Hershey, it was not expected, it came out of the blue. We are in a season of listening to what God would have us do. I have been absolutely amazed at how God has already opened so many doors for our music ministry since Tuesday, doors we didn't even know existed. While I am saddened by the sudden departure, I am almost giddy to see and listen to where God is leading us. But we have to listen to God. We can't step into this process with preconceived ideas as to where God is leading us. We have seen this. We have often stepped into these processes thinking we know where God is leading, only to find out that it was not at all in the direction that we thought. So we need to listen and not build our booths around any individual that we think we may have pegged as the successor.

We will all face changes in our plans, and when that happens it can be terrifying. We can choose to act like Elisha and tell those around us to be quiet because we have already made up our minds what our plans are going to be. We can face them like Peter where blurt out the first thing that comes to our mind which is inevitably something that is for our good and to protect our interests and are earthly bound, and not what is divine or of God. Our choice is fairly clear

in the Transfiguration. We are called to listen to Jesus in the midst of the cloud, and in the cloud you can't always see clearly. But Jesus has been speaking to us even before we were in the cloud. Jesus has been telling us how to follow him.

A change in plans often necessitates a change in heart. It is only when we listen to him will we understand what that means. Amen.