

“Never Mistake a Comma for a Period”

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Luke 9:28-36

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighted down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” – not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him.” When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

This morning is the second Sunday of Lent and as we continue our journey through the wilderness our setting has grown a little more barren. It is our hope that during these 40 days of Lent the changing decorations here in our worship space can somehow reflect the journey that we’re traveling as individuals and as a congregation; the journey of self examination, of prayer, and of growth that is Lent. While we know how the story ends, while we are Easter people, an important part of our faith journey is to take seriously this time of journeying in the wilderness that Lent provides for us.

Last week Steve talked about the importance of the journey and I want to reiterate that again as we begin this morning. The point of Christianity is not simply the end, getting into heaven. And at the same time, the point of the Lent is not the end, Easter. But, it is the journey, both through life and through these 40 days, that is important. The point of the journey is the journey.

And this morning we’re going to talk about one of the greatest risks that we face and one of the greatest pitfalls that we must avoid on the journey. This risk that we face

in different ways at different times, but that we're all likely to experience in our lives, is complacency. As we journey through life we reach places and times where we're comfortable, having fun, enjoying things, and decide that we'd like to stay there forever. Our tendency to do this is what I would call putting a period where God intends a comma.

My dad is one of those people who constantly writes down notes on little slips of paper; quotations, reminders, phone numbers, things he's heard and wants to refer back to all find their way onto small pieces of paper that are on his desk, his dresser, in his wallet and pockets. I remember vividly an evening when he came home from work in the early to mid 90's with a new quotation that he had come across that day. As he pulled the piece of paper out of his pocket he gave me the inspiration for the sermon I'm preaching today. The slip of paper simply read, "Don't put a period where God put a comma."

These words are the title for a 1993 book written by Nell Mohney. A book that is long since out of publication and didn't seem to have great success or readership in its day, they are words nonetheless that impressed my father. And while as a middle school student, I don't think I really got it, but it had been written on one of my dad's little slips of paper and he seemed to think it was profound so for some reason or another I tucked those words away and have held onto them as important ever since.

As I have grown I have come to understand these words to be important for Christians as we continue on our journey. The temptation is at times great to go ahead and call it quits, to put a period in our story, drawing it to a close. However, all too often when we do this we ignore God's call to grow, to continue on the journey. The scripture reading this morning is one that illustrates beautifully both our tendency to get

comfortable and to want to stay put and God's call for us to continue on our journey.

(Luke 9:28-36)

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighted down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" – not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him." When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

In the Gospel of Luke this story takes place as Jesus is journeying to Jerusalem. Jesus takes some of his followers up the mountain to pray and something almost supernatural is reported to have happened. As they are on the mountain there is this profound religious experience – this revelation and what does Peter want to do? After having this great religious experience Peter's first reaction is not to go share the news with others, it is not to find ways to help others have a similar experience, no, and in fact it is quite the opposite. Peter's first reaction to this religious experience is that he wants to stay put, to build homes on the mountain so that they can stay there. While the text

doesn't state it explicitly, I think it is safe to assume that Peter wants to stay because he thought what he had experienced was really cool and that he wanted to stay as close as possible to it with the hope of experiencing it again.

But what happens as Peter begins to lay out his plans to stay? Before he even finishes speaking the voice of God is heard breaking in and telling Peter and James and John that they are to listen to Jesus, to follow Jesus. As Jesus says just a few verses earlier in Luke, they are to pick up their crosses and follow Jesus. There is no time to stay put and there is no reason to try to maintain things the way they were first experienced. Jesus tells us we can't be comfortable, we can't stay where we are simply because we're happy with it.

This story illustrates a calling for us as Christians, especially during this time of Lent, to continue on the journey, to not set up camp where we are, to not feel as if we want to preserve and maintain experiences and things the way they've always been. We are called as individuals and as a community to keep moving forward, to continue on the journey, to never put a period where God would have there be a comma.

Monday evening as I listened to NPR I heard a great interview on Marketplace that illustrated our human tendency to stay comfortable as well as the benefits of challenging ourselves. The interview was of John Mackey, one of the founders of the Organic Grocery store, Whole Foods Market. John Mackey's story is one worth sharing.

In the 1970's, after dropping out of three different Texas colleges, Mackey joined a vegetarian co-op. Admittedly, one of his primary reasons for moving into the co-op was the hope of meeting some interesting girls. While he was there however he focused on reading philosophy, cooking natural foods and being outdoors. He eventually became

responsible for the selecting and preparing of meals and his growing food consciousness eventually led him into what would become the Whole Foods Market.

In 1978 he and his girlfriend at the time, who he did meet in the co-op, opened Safer Way, a vegetarian grocery store. They were able to open the store with a \$45,000 loan from friends and family who believed in what they were doing. By the end of the second year the store was turning a small profit, but Mackey wasn't satisfied. He began to realize that in order for a store like this to really succeed they would need to open it in a bigger space. With this vision for a larger store Mackey returned to some of the investors who had helped him with the initial investment. They weren't thrilled with the idea. In fact, one of the investors said something to the effect of, Look, you've just begun turning a profit and I'd like to get some of my money back, why don't you just hold out, why don't you just wait, why don't you just keep things the way they are for a little while.

This investor was, in many ways, like Peter. Excited about the way things were going, but wanting to keep them that way. This investor, again like Peter, didn't want to take a risk to move on and to share what was happening with a larger group of people. Fortunately for Mackey and for fans of Organic Groceries, his friends gave in and helped with the funds that were needed to expand the market. Mackey reached out then, merged with another small grocery store in the area, and in 1980 opened the first full scale supermarket style natural foods store, a 10,000 square foot market in Austin Texas called Whole Food Natural Market.

Mackey had a vision for how things could be. Even when people around him were content to stay put, to keep things as they were, he pushed forward and created something new.

As I've already said, this story from the Gospel of Luke, the story of John Mackey, and our call to never put a period where God would have there be a comma, are all challenges to us as individuals and as a church as we move through Lent and continue on our Christian journey.

On the individual level the lesson to be learned from this is that we all have work to be done on our journey through life, especially in regards to our faith journey. We will never know all we can about God's hopes for our lives and for the world, we will never have fully experienced God through worship, we will never have served to the point that there is no longer a need in God's creation. As individuals we are called through all of our lives to never become too comfortable or complacent with where we are in life. As we journey through lent and through all of our lives we are called to take risks, to live and love boldly, and to find ways to deepen our connection with God and to share that connection with the world.

As a faith community we have a similar calling to never be complacent or overly comfortable. In the last week and a half I have had conversations with people at two other churches in the community about the struggles those communities are facing. There is infighting, there is tension, there are power moves being made by people in the congregation, and membership and worship attendance are declining. We are lucky here at Ridge, we are a relatively healthy community where there are a lot of great things going on. However, we need to be careful. As we settle into systems and routines our

tendency is going to be to become nice and comfortable. It is in many ways human nature.

As a congregation though, we've got a great history of moving forward when we could otherwise be complacent. We were founded in 1955 when people decided that there was a need for a Methodist Church in Munster. In 1984, after worshipping for years in the old Fellowship Hall we built a sanctuary, understanding that that was necessary for growth. In 2003 we opened our new Fellowship Hall with the hope of it bringing growth and opportunities for programs. Imagine what the future can hold for us as we continue to grow in our love of God and our service to one another.

As we continue our journey as individuals and as a congregation through Lent, may you find ways to continue to grow in your relationship with God and with others. And may we all, find ways to have a vision for the future and to never be complacent, to never be satisfied with where we are. And may God be with us all as we learn and grow about what God would have us be as a community of faith.