

Moving Forward  
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Mark 9:2-8

*2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them,<sup>3</sup> and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.<sup>4</sup> And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.<sup>5</sup> Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.'<sup>6</sup> He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.<sup>7</sup> Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!'<sup>8</sup> Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.*

I can't believe this day is finally here. When we first announced in February that we would be leaving Ridge Church and heading back to Kansas I found myself saying over and over again "it's a long ways away, we've got lots of time, we don't have to talk about that now." But over the last couple of weeks the reality has become more and more clear that time is running out to say our goodbyes. In the next couple of days Heather and I will frantically scramble to pack the last of our things, the moving truck will arrive on Wednesday and Thursday morning we'll head back out of town and toward the next phase of life in Kansas. It is a natural part of life, especially in this United Methodist world, but I am sad to go! I am excited to move to what is next, but sad to leave behind the people and the church that I love so much. I have found no better word than bittersweet to describe this time in the last weeks.

As we gather together this morning as a community of faith we are in the midst of a whole lot of wonderful and terrifying and emotional and exciting things. This morning, in the midst of all of these things that we are feeling and experiencing, I want to talk a bit about moving forward; the moving forward that Heather and I are doing, the moving

forward that Pastor Nathan and Sara are doing as they prepare to come and be with you in the coming weeks, and the moving forward that Ridge Church is doing as we move into the future.

The scripture that we read a few minutes ago is a story from the Gospel of Mark that always speaks to me in profound ways. Steve talked some last week about our resistance to and the discomfort that comes with change. I watched last week when Steve asked if anyone like change and I saw one person between all three services raise their hand. We tend to get comfortable with things the way they are and want them to stay that way. This is exactly what is going on with Peter in the story that was read just a few minutes ago.

Peter and James and John are gathered with Jesus on a mountain top, presumably to pray, when this indescribable and mystic thing happens. The author of Mark explains that as they were on the mountain Jesus “was transfigured before them,<sup>3</sup> and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.<sup>4</sup> And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.”

As Peter and James and John looked on Jesus had some kind of a mystical experience – scholars call it the transfiguration – and two of the great leaders of the Hebrew faith – Moses and Elijah appear to be with Jesus. It is Peter’s response to this encounter that always strikes me? How does Peter respond?

He doesn’t tremble in fear, he doesn’t run and cower – the way we might if faced with this kind of an experience. Peter gets really excited about the way things are and says to Jesus – this is great, we should stay here like this and keep things this way always. Peter wants to build three dwellings – one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah

and then they can all remain on the mountain top continually reliving this experience that they're so excited about.

The author of Mark doesn't tell us directly how Jesus responds to Peter's scheming, but verse nine is telling. It begins with the words, "as they were coming down the mountain..." Immediately following Peter's plea that they might stay and maintain things the way they are Jesus leads them back down the mountain. This story illustrates for us the reality of our human nature, that we want to set up camp and stay where we're comfortable. At the same time it illustrates for us the reality of life that things don't always stay the same and that even when we're trying to keep things exactly the way they are, Jesus calls us to keep moving forward.

As I said there is much moving forward happening for Heather and I, for Nathan and Sara, and for Ridge Church as a whole. In the coming weeks Heather and I will both begin working at new churches in Kansas as we settle into our new home. On July 1<sup>st</sup> I'll begin at the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood as a part of their Congregational Care team. On July 2<sup>nd</sup> we'll close on our home in Olathe. On July 7<sup>th</sup> the movers will bring our stuff. On July 15<sup>th</sup> Heather will begin as the director of contemporary music at Lawrence First United Methodist Church, the church in which we first met and in which we were married. We are excited and scared to be moving forward into this new phase of life.

Pastor Nathan and Sara are in the midst of exciting transition as well. On June 30<sup>th</sup> Pastor Nathan will end his time at Colfax United Methodist Church. Somewhere around July 4<sup>th</sup> Tucker Whybrew will come into the world. On July 9<sup>th</sup> Nathan and Sara will move into their new parsonage here in Munster. There is a great deal of exciting

change happening for them both as they move forward into the new adventures that await them as they come to be in ministry with all of the wonderful people and all of the fantastic opportunities at Ridge Church. I imagine that this is an exciting and scary time for them as well.

As Heather and I move forward from our role at Ridge Church and Nathan and Sara move forward into their new roles at Ridge Church the church as a whole continues to move forward as well. I am excited about coming back this way in two to three years for a visit and seeing the things that are happening here. I am excited about seeing all of the ways in which you are reaching out to the community and making a difference in the world. I trust that the ministries of Ridge Church three years from now or five years from now will be beyond anything that any of us can even imagine.

As I think about the story of Jesus and Peter and James on John up on that mountain I am increasingly convinced that Ridge Church nor any organization for that matter, will be able to move forward when the power and control are left totally in the hands of the people. It is our tendency to resist change, to fight to keep things the way they are, and the only way in which Ridge Church or any church will be able to move forward is by remaining open to and responding to the guidance of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

The reality is that in order for a body like Ridge church to move forward, the people who make up that body have to be moving forward as well. Steve talked last week about the importance of transformation as the heart of the Christian life. We must all continue to be moving forward as people of faith. I've done a lot of reflecting in the last couple of weeks about the growth that has happened, for me personally, for people at

Ridge Church and for Ridge Church as a community of faith in these past three years. And learning from these lessons and building upon these foundations will be essential as Ridge Church seeks to move forward.

Personally I've grown an incredible amount as a human being, as a Christian, and as a pastor during my time at Ridge Church. I have been incredibly blessed to learn about and experience a variety of types of ministry and leadership especially as Steve was on Sabbatical and I had the opportunity to oversee some of the administration of the church.

I have also learned an incredible amount about self care and how important is for us as people of faith to care for ourselves by eating, sleeping, and exercising adequate amounts. I have grown in my faith through the rich witness of folks at Ridge. I have grown in my hope for what the local church can accomplish as I've seen you look beyond yourselves in service to the community and the world. I have been incredibly blessed to be in ministry here and I will continue to build upon the things I've learned here as I move forward into the future.

More important than the growth I've experienced on my own is the growth that I have witnessed in others as we've journeyed together these last years. It has been inspiring to see people begin to connect with a God who loves them and is bigger than all of the boxes in which we try to place God. It has been powerful to see people name and claim their questions and to begin to wrestle with God as they have been given permission to ask questions and to challenge conventional thinking about faith and life. I have had my spirits lifted and been enthused as I have watched people learn to rely on

God and one another, as people (and the church as a whole) have continued to grow in faith and love.

As individual members of Ridge Church have grown over these last years it has been a blessing to watch Ridge church continue to grow as well. We ended last year with more than 400 members and beyond the increases in membership we have seen more and more people getting involved in the ministries of the church. Each year that I've been here I've been amazed to watch people come together for Vacation Bible School, for the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July, for the Corn Crib, and more as we have lived and worked together as a community of faith.

It has been great to watch the mission and outreach of Ridge Church continue to grow in these last years. As Ridge Church shifted to focus mission energy in the four different areas of local, national, international and environmental missions more and more people have had opportunities to serve God and others. As greeters have opened doors for worshippers on Sunday morning and people have smiled and welcomed each other it has been great to see the warmth of God shared in such intimate ways.

And of the greatest blessing to me has been the opportunity to be involved with the youth group here for these last three years. The Ridge Youth are an incredible group of young people who are wise beyond their years, who have incredible hearts for God and for one another, and who have been a huge blessing in my life. I hope that Pastor Nathan is as welcomed and as loved as I have been by this incredible group!

I am convinced that it is because the people of Ridge Church have been moving forward over these last years that the church itself has been moving forward. No church, no community of faith can move forward, can become the people that God want them to

be, if individual people aren't moving forward and growing in the process. And please understand that I can't and I won't take credit for any of these great things that have happened in the last years, I've simply been blessed to be a part of God's work in this great place with you great people.

This week Heather and I very literally move forward in our lives. We leave this place and all of you wonderful people who have loved us as family over these last years and we return home to KS where our biological family waits for us. During these times of pastoral transition there is a phrase that is commonly thrown around – After today I won't be your pastor any more, but I can always be your friend. I understand that on some levels this sounds cliché, but it is true.

I am being appointed to serve another church in another annual conference. Pastor Nathan is being appointed to serve here at Ridge. Steve and Nathan will now be responsible for the pastoral functions of Ridge Church. As I go forward I will always take all of you in my heart, I will always take Ridge Church and the difference that my time here has made with me as I go. And I look forward to seeing how you continue to grow as individuals and as a congregation. As your friend I will always be interested in how your stories continue to unfold. Heather and I hope that some of you might come to Kansas City and see us in the coming years. I am sure that we'll come back this way in a couple of years to visit and to see you. But as I move forth in these coming weeks I pass the reigns to Nathan to be your Associate Pastor.

And as Pastor Nathan and Sara move forward in these coming days and weeks I trust that they will be blessed by this fantastic faith community in the same ways that you have been such a blessing to Heather and I. For the sake of the ministry to which we

have all been called – welcome them, love them, and share your lives with them as you have with us. They aren't Heather and I, and some things will be done differently in the coming weeks and months, but change is a natural and healthy part of what it means to move forward.

These are the realities of the United Methodist system in which we find ourselves – pastors move forward. A less certain reality is whether or not church members all move forward – yes your lives will constantly change, but choices must be made about whether or not and to what degree you will move forward and grow in the midst of those changes.

So on this last Sunday as your Associate Pastor I want to challenge you to ask yourselves... How are you moving forward? How will your faith be stronger a year from now than it is now? Will you be involved with a Bible Study? Will you engage with a small group? Will you spend time reading your bible daily? Will you reach out and serve in risk taking ways? How will you continue to move forward in faith so that Ridge Church can continue to move forward and grow as well? I have no doubt that the future for Ridge Church is bright as you continue to move forward in faith.

Again, I want to thank you for the love and support you've shown Heather and me over these last three years as we've partnered together in ministry. I am deeply humbled and touched by the love I've been shown these last weeks and I will forever be grateful. I look forward to connecting with you in the future to see how you are moving forward and how Ridge Church is moving forward as well, for this is our call – to never be too comfortable, to never want things to remain exactly as they are, and to move forward with the guidance and the love of God.