

A Sermon for Robbinsdale United Church of Christ
by Rev. T. Michael Rock
Sunday, October 18, 2009

Scripture Reading: Mark 10: 35-45
Sermon Title: "Be Careful What You Wish For"

(open with prayer)

Last week I talked about the Bible being a book of faith and not a book of fact and I also talked about how the stories in scripture would help lead us to a greater understanding of ourselves and ultimately an understanding of the truth. If we can only believe that truth will set us free than we can look at stories like the one today and admit to ourselves how little we understand.

So, I'll go first. I don't know that much. I make mistakes every day. I don't know the first thing about how to lead this congregation to growth and a deeper sense of faith. I am confused by all the different guides and studies put out by the church. I feel like a piece of paper being tossed by the wind. I wish there was a handbook about how to do the job of pastor and teacher, but alas, there are hundreds and they don't always agree. It's enough to make me run away, but then I get to reflect on these goofy disciples in the Bible and realize that I am not alone.

In fact, I think its funny that for years the denominations pushed churches into "disciple" language. We really wanted the people in the pews to follow Jesus in a way that was sacrificial and powerful. Being a "disciple" was often seen as this higher sense of calling and purpose. The problem was that most of the folks in the pew didn't like the language. They were intimidated by it and most could never see themselves being that close to Jesus. Today, we are recommended to drop all "insider" language like "discipleship" because folks who are visiting or are new to the church will probably not understand what that language means. I would make the statement right now that none of us understand what it means.

In today's story, a disciple is a person who wants security over service and assurances over faith. Today, the ones who were closest to Jesus, those disciples, are looking for the mother of all insurance policies. Please Jesus, "let us sit in heaven with you, right by your side so that we can be seen as your favorites when you are." These aren't mature spiritual people. These are kids on the playground seeing who gets to play with a "cool kids." The disciples continue to reveal how they are bound by approval, success, and the desire to be "right". Why would the church ever lift up their example as ones to follow? Because that is who we are.

Be like us. Look at us. See how important we are. Look at our steeple. Look at our membership roles. Look at our stewardship drive. We are important. We are closer to God than you are. NNYAAYH! This is what I do. I brag. I boast. I see myself as better than a lot of people and certainly closer to God. Look at me. Look at this fancy threads.

Then I reflect on this story and read Jesus' words over and over again until they begin to speak to me and all I can do fall on my knees and say how sorry I am. The disciples want something they cannot have and so do I. The disciples see themselves as more important than they really are, and so do I. The disciples are driven by fear that all that have worked for will somehow be taken away, and so am I. Fear makes us do and say silly things. Wanting security for ourselves rather than being open to serving others is rooted in our fear. For years I frequented this little fair trade coffee shop and I got to know the folks who I drank coffee and shared the paper with. This one regular and I used to talk all the time about religion and politics, because that's what I do at coffee shops. Our basic conversations were always based on our common work as sales persons. He talked openly about selling fear and I talked openly about selling freedom. He was the founder and CEO of a large home/business security system and I was a local pastor and community organizer. His best clients were people who were religious. He was convinced that Christianity was a religion based on fear, because so many Christians bought what he was selling. I couldn't really argue with him based on the finances, but I could based on stories like this one.

It was true, too often Christianity has been promoted as a one of discipleship. Follow Jesus, get forgiven, receive grace, protect all you have, and wait for the reward on the other side. The formula is simple and successful. It fills stadiums with worshippers and it based in fear. This formula builds large sanctuaries and pays big salaries and it is based in fear. This is the story of the disciples – little kids cowering the boat, sinking in the water, asking for more stuff, wanting to sit in the important chairs. My five-year-old can so identify. The disciples are petty, immature, and really only care about themselves and the same can be said for much of Christianity.

Jim Wallis, author of "God's Politics" was on NPR this week and commenting about how he could understand the point of view that a single payer healthcare system would make the tax payer responsible for the single mother with four kids, or the immigrant family, or the mentally ill. He could understand that people didn't want to do that or take on that responsibility. He just said that you couldn't hold that ideological opinion and call yourself a Christian or for that matter, a person of faith. Wallis made it abundantly clear that a church of followers does not bring about the kingdom of God. What Wallis remind the audience was that Jesus called on us be leaders in the service of others. Take care of the single

mom, take care of the immigrant, take care of the mentally ill. Don't let people suffer alone, but suffer with them. There is no reward in some other time or place. Your reward is here and now in my presence as we feed the hungry, heal the sick, forgive, love, clothe, and even sacrifice. **Your freedom is no longer needing approval, success, or insurance.** Your freedom is found in letting go of all those childish ways and being in this moment, surrounded by love, surrounded by friends. Your freedom is expressed in your singing, your prayer, your offering.

Jesus does not offer insurance plans. Jesus offers an end to a system that seeks to divide rich from poor. Jesus offers a new definition of power to these lowly disciples. You will no longer see power as a way to control your own life or the lives of others. There will no longer be winners and losers, insiders and outsiders, honored and shamed. All of us will die, and I will show you the way. All of us are but ash and dust. Status and approval are made up. What is real is how you know love and how you serve others. Nothing in this world or any other world can take that away. Not even death on the cross. So, if you really want to be like me, then come on. I will lead you all the way to death on the cross, and on the way we will welcome everyone to a life of abundance and riches through sharing, loving, living and being truly grateful for the moment they have been given. We will show each other true freedom and a way to live without fear. We will help the world know that the greatest security system is knowing that God is in me and I am in God. You are in me and I am you. So, be careful what you wish for, because, a false sense of security will only bring you a life of fear. Instead come with me and I will show you how the first will be last and the last will be first. I will show you that the more you give the more you will receive. I will show you that the more you love the more you will know love. I will show you that the way to peace is by being peaceful. I will show you that the only true insurance policy is when perfect love casts out fear and when no one is left out in the cold.

AMEN.