

RIDING WITH JESUS

5-7-06

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Mk. 1:16-20 and Luke 5:1-11

DRAMA, based upon the poem, "The Road of Life"

THE ROAD OF LIFE

At first, I saw God as my observer,
my judge,
keeping track of the things I did wrong,
so as to know whether I merited heaven
or hell when I die.
He was out there sort of like a president.
I recognize His picture when I see it,
but I really didn't know Him.

But later on
when I met Christ,
it seemed as though life were rather like a bike ride,
but it was a tandem bike,
and I noticed that Christ
was in the back helping me pedal.

I don't know just when it was
that He suggested we change places,
but life has not been the same since.

When I had control,
I knew the way.
It was rather boring,
but predictable...
It was the shortest distance between two points.

But when He took the lead,
He knew delightful long cuts,
up mountains,
and through rocky places
at breakneck speeds,
it was all I could do to hang on!
Even though it looked like madness,
He said, "Pedal!"
I worried and was anxious

and asked,
"Where are you taking me?"
He laughed and didn't answer,
and I started to learn to trust.

I forgot my boring life
and entered into the adventure.
And when I'd say, "I'm scared,"
He'd lean back and touch my hand.

He took me to people with gifts that I needed,
gifts of healing,
acceptance
and joy.
They gave me gifts to take on my journey,
my Lord's and mine.

And we were off again.
He said, "Give the gifts away;
they're extra baggage, too much weight."
So I did,
to the people we met,
and I found that in giving I received,
and still our burden was light.

I did not trust Him,
at first,
in control of my life.
I thought He'd wreck it;
but He knows bike secrets,
knows how to make it bend to take sharp corners,
knows how to jump to clear high rocks,
knows how to fly to shorten scary passages.

And I am learning to shut up
and pedal
in the strangest places,
and I'm beginning to enjoy the view
and the cool breeze on my face
with my delightful constant companion,
Jesus Christ.

And when I'm sure I just can't do anymore,
He just smiles and says..."Pedal."

– Author unknown

INTRODUCTION

Going to do something different in building my sermon around the poem we used with our pretend tandem bicycle. I first came across this poem, many years ago in a book by Tim Hansel, Holy Sweat. The image of the tandem bicycle has been a helpful one to me in thinking of the Christian life, and I've found it's concrete nature has often helped others as well.

Polly and I did this skit a few years ago in a previous church. When I walked in dressed like Jesus, a little three-year-old girl who was a regular attender with her grandmother, pulled her grandmother's sleeve and said in breathless excitement, "Grandma, God's here today!" And, throughout the skit, and even as I was preaching, she'd occasionally give a shy wave of her hand like, "Notice me here, Jesus."

Well, God is here every Sunday. But the metaphor used in the poem is quite helpful in our understanding some important elements of the Christian life. It has the potential to clarify some confusing things for us and help us better discern God's call in our lives and the grace of His ways with us. I'd like you to locate yourself in your faith journey in this picture of a bike ride with Jesus.

Many of us know people that seem to be totally and completely surrendered to Christ. It seems there is no doubt that Jesus is in front on the tandem bike, leading the way in everything. If you're not there, while that can be quite inspiring it also can seem a little intimidating—something beyond what we could ever be and do. This morning I want to give you some bridges to get there by understanding the process God uses in our lives in growing our level of commitment in discipleship.

JESUS' CALL

Right at the beginning of Mark's gospel, we are told of Jesus' call to His first four disciples in Mark 1:16-20. Let's look at this.

It is a wonderful, exciting scene. Jesus' call is clear and the disciples respond with an immediate decision, leaving their work and following Jesus—embracing a new vocation. "At once" and "without delay" are phrases jumping out at us. There is an immediacy in Christ's call to us. It is not open to negotiation or delay. We understand from this that Peter didn't have the option of saying, "Get back with me on that tomorrow, Lord." We understand, "not now" is tantamount to saying "no" when it comes to God's call.

When I meet someone with an inspiring, radical commitment to the call of Christ—doing marvelous things in the kingdom of God—I often ask, "Just how did you get to the point of following Jesus in this way?" I want to know the process. I need things broken down in smaller steps. And, usually what is described is a series of smaller choices building to the big decision to trust Jesus all the way.

There is also a process going on with the call of these four disciples as we fit all the gospels together. What we see in Mark (and Matthew) is one major step. But it began prior to this. At

least three of them (if not all) were likely disciples of John the Baptist. In John 1:35-42 we learn that Andrew and another disciple (probably John) were there when Jesus passed by while John the Baptist was preaching. They heard John the Baptist declare, "Look, the Lamb of God!" These two disciples broke away and began following after Jesus. Andrew went and got Peter, his brother and brought him to Jesus. So, you see, the beginning was even prior to the start of Jesus' ministry. John the Baptist laid foundations and they were in on that teaching. This all took place in Judea, probably near Jericho on the Jordan river.

Now the scene we read in Mark is about 60 mi. up North in Galilee. Here is what I'd refer to as the second stage of their call. Prior to this, they had been with Jesus at various times, as work and family commitments allowed. This call involves leaving fishing and following Jesus full time, no longer fishing for fish but now fishing for people—bringing them to Jesus for salvation.

Then, in Luke 5:1-11, is what I'll refer to as the third stage of their calling. Let's read this. I don't think this is the same event as recorded in Mark for two reasons.

1. First of all, because they don't sound like the same situation at all, though by some stretch of the imagination you can put the two together (which is what some Bible scholars do). If it were the same incident, surely Mark and Matthew would mention the miraculous catch of fish.
2. But, there is a second compelling reason in statements made by Peter and Jesus. In response to the miraculous catch of fish, Peter says, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man." Why would he feel sinful in response to this? Then Jesus tells him, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." This makes sense only if Peter was truly afraid of leaving everything, and had backed away from the commitment.

As we put this together with the Mark passage, it sounds like these four disciples had been asked to trust Jesus completely in that incident. But, they hadn't been able to handle it. While they initially left their boats and nets to follow, perhaps they backed off a bit and tried to go back to fishing. After all, they had to make a living. They were afraid of trusting Jesus completely.

But, notice how Jesus deals with their inability to make that total break with their former life. It is not met with condemnation, but loving understanding. He builds them a bridge of trust they can cross—a miracle that would speak especially to them, assuring them the economics were no problem. Fishing was done at night on the Sea of Galilee with bell-shaped nets cast around fish and then drawn in. They had spent a night of frustration, catching no fish. Here we see illustrated that you can't go back to how it was before you decided to follow Jesus. The old way of life wasn't working any more for them. In the midst of their discouragement and frustration, Jesus shows up and begins teaching from their boat as they are on the shore washing up their nets. Then, after the teaching, Jesus gives the irrational command to put out for a catch of fish. It made no sense since the morning was the worst time for this type of fishing. Peter, to his credit, while pointing out the unreasonable nature of it does obey— "Because you say so..." He's laid the proper ground work of a satisfying, "I told you so..." And I expect this is the largest catch of fish they've ever had—two boats loaded so full they are almost sinking. With that, we are told they "left **everything** and followed him."

Now, let's switch our thinking to the bicycle built for two.

TANDEM BIKE RIDE

Note there were three stages in the bike ride.

First, is before we are a Christian. God is external, “out there” somewhere.

At first, I saw God as my observer,
my judge,
keeping track of the things I did wrong,
so as to know whether I merited heaven
or hell when I die.
He was out there sort of like a president.
I recognize His picture when I see it,
but I really didn't know Him.

This is where a lot of people are in our world. Christianity is a set of rules, a guide to our behavior. Our relationship with God is in how well perform in keeping the rules. Think about all the jokes about getting into heaven, and there are some really funny ones. But, everyone I can think of has to do with an evaluation of our performance. This is not Christianity.

The **second stage** begins when Christ enters our life and becomes useful to us. In the poem, He is helping pedal in the tough spots, making life work better.

But later on
when I met Christ,
it seemed as though life were rather like a bike ride,
but it was a tandem bike,
and I noticed that Christ
was in the back helping me pedal.

Throughout Christ's ministry, people began a relationship at their place of need– healing, deliverance from the power of the devil, help with their lives. As they received the gift of that help, they then began the journey of discipleship. God meeting their needs in Christ let them know of His love and care for them.

Many of us come to Christ because we need him. Our life is a mess and unmanageable. We need help to deal with our fears, and our problems. We are in bondage to sin. Perhaps we face a crisis that needs His miraculous intervention. So, our needs bring us to Christ. And, this is the wonderful thing about God's grace– He takes us in on that basis. He gladly comes to us and begins working in our life at this place of need. It is tempting for us to relegate Him to only that position, in the back seat, helping us pedal. We are still in the driver's seat, doing what we decide and going where we want Him to go. He is there when we need him. But, that is not the way the Christian life is meant to be lived. And, as the poem says:

When I had control,
I knew the way.
It was rather boring,

but predictable...
It was the shortest distance between two points.

Then, **stage three** is giving Him total control. That's where the fun and adventure are. Do you think Peter, Andrew, James and John looked back and ever regretted leaving it all for Jesus? As a pastor, I don't ever recall hearing anyone say, "I wish I hadn't been so committed to Christ. I think I missed out on a lot by following Christ." As in the poem:

But when He took the lead,
He knew delightful long cuts,
up mountains,
and through rocky places
at breakneck speeds,
it was all I could do to hang on!
Even though it looked like madness,
He said, "Pedal!"
I worried and was anxious
and asked,
"Where are you taking me?"
He laughed and didn't answer,
and I started to learn to trust.

In reality, everything is not as clear-cut as the three stages:

1. God is external, out there with a set of rules judging our behavior.
2. God with us, but we're still in control.
3. God is in control.

Most of the time, there's a little of all this going on in our lives. When we become a Christian, we let Him be in control, the Lord of our lives. But, often we relapse and take back some of that control. We put God in a box, trying to get Him to do as we'd like. Or, at times drift into a Christianity that is largely rules and doing, with almost nothing of the personal relationship with Christ. Someone said they thought the most important word in the New Testament is not love, grace, faith, or any of those essential words. Instead, it is the little three-letter word, "LET," as in "let go and let God." That is a pretty good description of the major movement of the Christian life.

CONCLUSION

Where would you place yourself at present in the Christian life? Maybe your faith is mostly following rules, hoping you'll make it to heaven. Maybe you've let Christ in, but have firmly fixed where He is in your life and what you want Him to do. You pray to get His help, but not to enjoy a relationship with Him. You seek Him to support your plans and your life. You live life pretty much the way you want it. Maybe there are times or areas where He really is in the driver's seat, but not everywhere.

If any of the above is where you're at, it's time to let go of more of your life. If your Christianity is boring and extremely safe, that too is a call to more letting go. Discover the adventure He has

for you. If there is a willingness in your heart, He'll provide the assurances needed to make the next step even as He did with those first four disciples.