

Weekend of Sunday, September 16, 2018
17th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 24/Proper 19/Year B
Primary Text: Mark 8:27-38
Sermon Title: “The Seven Faith Practices - Encourage”

Theme

This story provides the turning point in Mark’s gospel. Peter is the first human being in the narrative to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, but he cannot accept that as the Messiah Jesus will have to suffer. Moreover, Jesus issues a strong challenge to all by connecting discipleship and the cross.

Text

²⁷Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” ²⁸And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” ³⁰And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Sermon

This is the second installment in a seven-part series on the Seven Faith Practices. If you were here last weekend then you heard me say that the Seven Faith Practices were developed by the ELCA back in 2001 and personally, I think it is some of the best work that the ELCA has ever done. The Seven Faith Practices are seven verbs, seven action words that define the life of a disciple. And over the next several weeks we will spend a week each on each one. The disciple cannot pick and choose which of the Seven Faith Practices to practice. All are equally important and not one can be left out, although in God's creative genius, God gave each of us different personalities and characteristics and so it is only natural that we might find ourselves disproportionately involved in one or more of the Seven. That's completely OK.

Today we will be exploring the Faith Practice of Encourage. I did not choose special readings for this sermon series, preferring to just deal with what I was given by the lectionary editors. But it would appear as though Jesus was doing anything but encouraging his disciples.

He asked the question, "who do people say that I am," and you know the responses in this very familiar passage. And then he switched it up and asked them, "But who do *you* say that I am?" And of course Peter answered first, "You are the Messiah."

What a great opportunity Jesus had to *encourage* one of his disciples. "Great Peter, you got it right!" we might have expected Jesus to say. But no on the contrary, Mark wrote, "he *sternly ordered* them not to tell anyone about him."

Then in one of the greatest missteps in the NT, Jesus began to tell the disciples what his true mission was, and Peter, yes, Peter who just had a moment of brilliance, steps in it. He tried to get Jesus to stop the crazy talk about an ugly demise, and for that Jesus rebuked him and anyone else who would try to stop what was to be his fate.

But throughout that passage, I would argue that encouragement is present. Jesus very clearly told his followers what discipleship in him would mean. And he was clear, a life of discipleship won't be easy, but the reward of glory and eternal life will be worth it, now and in the age to come.

And while we would have to admit that a life of discipleship today, in this age and culture isn't really all that difficult, we still need encouragement to continue on the narrow path. And encouragement is every disciple's duty.

To encourage is to build community. Encouragement is the cluster of friendly attitudes and actions that forge relationships, building a diverse set of people in a community in Christ. Jesus promised to make community with us when he said, Matthew 18:20"For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." Encouragement makes it possible to cross lines of race Gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, politics, economic class, education level, generation or whatever else the culture tells us should divide us. Common social skills are transformed by the presence of the Holy One into acts of discipleship whereby the body of Christ, the church, is continually built up and strengthened for mission and ministry.

In a few moments, I will invite Brice Harris up to tell us about the specifics of the Encourage Table. Brice is not the table leader, that position is vacant though the Nominating Committee has tried to fill it. Ironic, don't you think, that the one table that is responsible for the action of encouragement is vacant? Maybe you should think about that. Brice will tell you what ministries are done through the Encourage Table. Fact is, though it really will do better with leadership, The Table does it work even without leadership. So I would like to *encourage* you to listen to Brice tell us what the Encourage Table does, and be *encouraged* to participate in the ministry it does for us and for others, and maybe you will be encouraged to come see me about being the Table's leader. Now here is Brice.

Section 1

Being a Christian is tough. God asks us to take on tasks that

We don't feel don't have the time for

We don't have the skill for

We don't even like, sometimes

Bible is full of stories of people like, maybe you, who are supposed to do something, but hesitate or resist but eventually do what God requests.

How were they enticed and transformed?

They were encouraged.

Pastor can you give an example of encouragement from the Scriptures?

Jonah, Moses

Pastor any other examples?

Letters from early Christians.

1. *Encouraged it how God gets us to do stuff (slide)*

Section 2

That's why Encourage makes the top 7.

Encourage is who we are as Christians to other Christians.

Encourage for taking on new tasks, encourage when someone is feeling down, encourage when someone is hurting, Encourage when someone needs encourage.

Encourage is support for one another.

That is why the Nooners are organized at the Encourage Table. It social, but it encourages.

Pastor what body part- skeleton. Supports, frame and then the muscles can do their job. The organs are protected. Everything functions since it is supported.

2. *Encourage is central to us a church like a skeleton to the body. To lift us up and support our lives (slide)*

Section 3

Encourage is what we do as Christians for other Christians.

In Zion one of the first ministries I got involved was Smiling Mum. Encourage.

When a member is ill we deliver a Smiling Mum as a reason to visit. The Smiling Mum is such a simple and effective way for one person to encourage another and say I love you, your church loves, God loves you, even when you're ill. When my knee blew out and reconstructed I received a Smiling Mum.

3. *We encourage as an act of love of member to member (slide)*

Section 4

I encourage you to encourage others. We all do it. By being here you are encouraging me.

Marian Chiu making it church for worship, I'm encouraged. Sympathy cards encourage.

Organized by church share meal, card shower.

Look at the Encourage activities... which one can you join?

Slide of Encourage Responsibilities:

Smiling mums

Share a meal

Share a ride

Changing Hearts

Zion Nooners

Needles and Thread

Which one fits your strengths? Cooking (or shopping for food)? Visiting people you know? Joining forces for social and social justice empowerment with our brother and sisters at New Beginnings?

4. *Encourage you to Encourage (slide)*

Section 5

We need you. You belong here. But also this Church is a place for you belong to fulfill what God calls for you. Being a Christian isn't just about making to Sunday morning it's about encouraging one another.

You Belong Here. We Belong Together. (slide)

Practice. Shake hands, hug respond.

Five Takeaways

- 1. Encouraged it how God gets us to do stuff*
- 2. Encourage is central to us a church like a skeleton to the body. To lift us up and support our lives*
- 3. We encourage as an act of love of member to member*
- 4. Encourage you to Encourage*
- 5. You Belong Here. We Belong Together. Practice greeting*