

“DARING FAITH: I – THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX”

Karen F. Bunnell
Elkton United Methodist Church
November 1, 2015

ALL SAINTS' SUNDAY

Mark 2:1-5

One day, a man named John and his son Philip were driving through town, when they came upon a massive traffic jam. Up ahead they could see that a large semi-trailer with a high load had become wedged under a railway overpass. The father was frustrated because of the hold-up, but the little boy was utterly fascinated by everything going on. There were police everywhere, and fire trucks and a big crane. There was even a train standing still, forced to stop at the approach to the bridge.

The longer the delay, the more the dad John fumed. But not young Philip. He could hardly contain himself as he watched. Then all of a sudden he sprang out of the car and ran toward all those important people, all standing there trying to figure out what to do.

“I know what to do,” he shouted. “I know how to get the truck out!”

The men, concerned for his welfare, but also thinking what could this little kid know, tried to shoo him away. But he wouldn't give up! Finally, one of the men said, “Okay, kid what do you think we should do?”

Whereupon the young man exclaimed, “If you want to get the truck unstuck, all you have to do is let the air out of the tires!”

Oh, out of the mouths of babes! He saw something nobody else could see, maybe because of his size. He saw things down low, while they were looking up at where the truck was stuck. Who knew a little kid would solve such a big problem? Without even knowing it, he was thinking outside the box!

Starting today and for the next few weeks, I'll be preaching a sermon series called “Daring Faith” and I'm doing so because that's the kind of faith I think Jesus invites us to have – daring faith. To look at things in new ways, to think outside the box, to see possibilities, to dare something different.

So what better scripture lesson could I start with than today's gospel lesson, about the paralyzed man and his friends. I mean, talk about thinking outside the box! Remember their story?

Jesus had returned from Capernaum and come home. He had done some amazing things, and word had spread how he was healing the sick and teaching God's word. So crowds were now gathering seeking to be near him – especially those in need of healing. In the crowd this particular day was a group of friends who had brought their paralyzed friend

to be healed by Jesus. No doubt when they left his home they were tremendously excited, thinking this could be the day their friend would walk. Together they carried him on his mat to the place where Jesus was. As they approached the house, they could see people, a lot of people, a whole lot of people heading in the same direction. Undeterred they kept going. They were going to get their friend to Jesus!

But the closer they got the more people they encountered. The crowd got thicker and thicker and pretty soon they could go no further. The path to Jesus was totally blocked. They must have been heartbroken. It appeared that this would not be the day their friend would be healed.

Then they looked up. I like to think this wasn't coincidental, that maybe they were lifting their eyes to God in prayer, hoping for guidance, and when they did, when they looked up, there was the answer – the roof. You know, roofs in that day were not like our roofs are, they were made from natural materials like dirt and _____ and put together by hand. So, if they were put together by hand, they could be taken apart by hand – and suddenly, they knew what they had to do.

They carried their friend on his mat up the stairs along the side of the house to that roof, tore open a piece of it large enough for the mat to fit through, and then attaching ropes to it, they lowered him down – right smack in the middle of that, by then, incredulous crowd; right smack at the feet of Jesus – who healed him right then and there!

Talk about daring, bold faith! You know what? I'll bet you anything that when that mat was coming down out of the ceiling toward him, Jesus had a great big smile on his face, that he was filled with joy at the faith of those men, the daring faith that caused them to do something no one could have imagined, to try something new.

It's the kind of thing he himself did all the time! Jesus was always stepping out and doing new things, always breaking through roofs, if you will. He was always open to God leading him in unexpected and amazing ways. He always kept his eyes open and, as a result, saw things others didn't.

He broke through convention and custom and shared God's love with anyone and everyone. He broke the Sabbath rules and showed that sometimes, people are more important. When everyone else could see that someone had died, that little child and even Lazarus, Jesus' daring faith and trust in God, caused Him to bring them back to life. Jesus lived every day with daring and bold faith – and he invited his followers to do the same!

Why else would he have challenged Peter to get up out of the boat and walk on water? And why else would he have challenged the rich young man to give up everything he had? And why else would he have thanked the woman who poured expensive ointment on his feet while others were scolding her?

Jesus lived boldly, with daring faith; He encouraged others in His day to do that, and I think, still, this day, He wants us to live that way too. To be bold and daring, to think outside the box, to try new things, dare new dreams!

On this All Saints' Sunday, as we remember the lives of the members of our church who died in the past year, I want to tell you - many of them are people who lived with daring and bold faith! They saw things other people didn't see, they did things in new and exciting ways, they stretched themselves, they shared their faith. And as they did, they touched our lives in such a way that we will never forget them.

One of them saw that young men in our community needed something to do, and instead of wringing his hands and saying "Oh, well" he helped form the youth football league that is still thriving today.

And one of them, while raising children of her own with her husband, opened her heart even more, and took in foster children – loving them when they needed it so badly.

Still another, from very young, had a song in her heart, and every chance she got she wrote music, wonderful music, music mostly about her faith, and shared it with anyone who would listen – to the very end of her days – our beloved Christian lounge singer, as I called her.

And yet another, when it seemed he had lost so much in life, began to share his time and talents at the fire house, giving hours and hours of time helping that place thrive.

Another one, despite her advancing age, continued to serve the American Legion, as she had for so many years, letting those who had served know how much they mattered.

And finally, one woman, at age 60 decided to take up painting. Her daring and bold faith must have led her to believe what C. S. Lewis once said, that "You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream." And oh, what an incredibly gifted painter she turned out to be.

I could go on forever telling stories of these faithful friends of ours. They lived with bold and daring faith, trusting God to send them to new places, to do new things, to be His faithful witnesses. And as they did, they made a mark on our world and a mark on our lives. And hopefully, they inspired us to be bold and daring ourselves.

Over the next few weeks, we're going to look at what it means to be bold and have daring faith, but for now, I want to invite us to celebrate these saints among us who left us this past year. With sadness that they are gone from our midst, but oh such gratefulness that they were in our lives, let us watch now and remember some very, very special people.

ALL SAINTS VIDEO