

1 Sermon, March 11, 2011

Texts: Mark 10:35-44, Psalm 10:1-18

Title: "A Journey to Hope – Overcoming Selfish Detours"

1. James & John wanted a shortcut
2. Evil people are those who want short cuts
3. The problem is that those short cuts become long detours
4. Jesus asks us to walk the narrow way; not easy but direct

1. James & John wanted a shortcut

On this journey to hope, we have an idea in our heads about what the goal should be. Heaven, getting rid of anger, peace inside – we have a place we want to be.

And we'd like to get to that place sooner, rather than later, thank you. This Christianity stuff is supposed to get results, make me a better person. Come on, God!

That's what happened with James and John. They wanted a shortcut to the kingdom of God. They wanted to get in line ahead of the rest of the disciples, and be seated next to Jesus in his kingdom.

It seems strange that James & John understood so little of Jesus' teachings that all they could see was the power in Jesus, and not see how Jesus used it. They wanted the power of Jesus' authority, his healing power, his ability to outwit his opponents. It was a pathetic attempt to turn Jesus' mission into something that glorified themselves rather than God.

James & John didn't seem to understand that Jesus' power was not a power over others, but a power alongside others.

The rest of the disciples got angry with James and John for trying to pull one over on them. That's pretty human. But if the other disciples really understood Jesus' mission, they would have laughed off James and John's efforts as irrelevant.

Yes, James and John were looking for a shortcut – a shortcut to power and plenty and self-importance.

2 Sermon, March 11, 2011

2. Evil people are those who want short cuts

But if you really think about it, most evil in the world is really the result of shortcuts – trying to do things the quick and easy way, trying to butt into line in front of the rest of the world.

Psalm 10 reads like a very current list of evil actions:

The psalm tells us, "Proud and brutal people hunt down the poor."

A couple of years ago, I heard of a telephone scam right here in our community. An older person was called by someone who said, "Grandma – I'm stuck in Florida and can't get home. Can you send me money?" It was false, and the person figured it out in time, but many have been duped.

What is that but a shortcut to money, trying to get the easy way what others labor for?

The psalm continues by telling us that wicked people brag about their desires and are too proud to turn to God. Do you remember the recent story about two robbers who accidentally dialed the police with their phone in their pocket and were heard planning their next robbery? The police met them there and arrested them.

What is robbery but a shortcut to wealth? It's a shortcut that tries to avoid the work most people use to get there.

The psalm tells us that "these wicked people are liars, they target innocent victims. They curse and tell lies, and all they talk about is how to be cruel or how to do wrong. They say, "God can't see! He's got on a blindfold."

When people lie, it is usually a shortcut – to avoid pain or get something they want.

When bend the rules for personal gain, it is a shortcut.

When people make enemies and then try to eliminate them, it's a shortcut to dominance over others.

When people use violence to threaten and intimidate, it's a shortcut to getting their way at the expense of others.

3. The problem is that those short cuts become long detours

3 Sermon, March 11, 2011

The problem is that when we try shortcuts, they in reality become long detours.

Once we start lying, it takes more lies to cover it up. It's not so simple.

Once we cheat another person, we risk them wanting to get even. We put ourselves in danger.

Once we make an enemy, it is very hard to unmake that enemy.

Shortcuts that benefit ourselves at the expense of others are sin. Not only does God not want us to sin, but sin traps us in a greater cycle of sin that's hard to get out of. These are detours that can last years.

4. Jesus asks us to walk the narrow way; not easy but direct

So what does Jesus tell us to do instead?

He said, "If you want to be great, you must be the servant of all the others. And if you want to be first, you must be everyone's slave."

No shortcuts putting yourself first. Nope. We put ourselves last in line. The journey that Jesus took led him to the cross. That was no shortcut. He gave himself away – he gave his life as a ransom for many, as it says in Mark's gospel.

How does that work?

Well, let me tell you three little stories about my friend, Satish, who was our tour guide in India.

First, Satish and his wife, Vicky, had an arranged marriage. Their "courtship" 35 years ago consisted of a couple of meetings arranged by family. Vicky said, no at first to the marriage. She didn't want a marriage where she would have to give up her career as a teacher. Satish said it was fine with him if she stayed working as a teacher.

She told Satish that she couldn't get married because her brother had died, and she had to look after her nieces. He said, "Have them come and live with us."

She said yes, because it was clear that for Satish, marriage was more about giving than taking.

Some years later, Priyanka, the daughter of Satish's friend from high school, was going to college in Jabalpur, where Satish and Vicky lived. They invited her to supper, and while she was there she

4 Sermon, March 11, 2011

complained that she couldn't stand living in the dorms. They said, "Come live with us." She spent the first year of college living with Satish and Vicky.

When Satish was a seminary teacher, he always tried to befriend students. Even in retirement, Satish has been teaching comparative religion in a Pentecostal seminary. One of the students there became interested in Satish and Victoria's maid, Mina. Mina attended church and became a Christian. Mina and the seminary student got engaged.

Mina's parents wanted to come and meet their daughter's fiancée, who lived at the seminary. But the young man wasn't sure the Seminary administrators would like Mina's Hindu parents meeting him on Seminary grounds. So he said to Mina, "I'm sure that Dr. Gyan would let us meet your parents at his home."

And it was done.

Lastly, I wanted to just tell you how remarkable it is that Satish was our tour guide for two and a half weeks. When we contacted Satish about getting his recommendation for a tour guide for a trip to India, we were touched and honored when he volunteered to do it himself.

This is remarkable. A man with a doctorate, retired ten years, who had suffered from a mild stroke that left him with a limp – this was the man who volunteered to guide us through India. He volunteered to plan our trip, buy all the tickets, arrange all the hotels, and even bring us to the wedding of his brother's son. This was the kind of work usually done by younger people for their elders.

But this was typical of Satish and should be typical of all followers of Christ. He gave himself away. He generously and freely did what Jesus said:

If you want to be great, you must be the servant of all the others.
And if you want to be first, you must be everyone's slave. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Let's live like Jesus and give ourselves away.
Amen.

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, will you do us a favor?"

Jesus asked them what they wanted, and they answered, "When you come into your glory, please let one of us sit at your right side and the other at your left."

5 Sermon, March 11, 2011

Jesus told them, "You don't really know what you're asking! Are you able to drink from the cup that I must soon drink from or be baptized as I must be baptized?"

"Yes, we are!" James and John answered.

Then Jesus replied, "You certainly will drink from the cup from which I must drink. And you will be baptized just as I must! But it isn't for me to say who will sit at my right side and at my left. That is for God to decide."

When the ten other disciples heard this, they were angry with James and John. But Jesus called the disciples together and said:

You know that those foreigners who call themselves kings like to order their people around. And their great leaders have full power over the people they rule. But don't act like them. If you want to be great, you must be the servant of all the others. And if you want to be first, you must be everyone's slave. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:35-45, CEV, NRSV)

Why are you far away, LORD?

Why do you hide yourself when I am in trouble?

Proud and brutal people hunt down the poor.

But let them get caught by their own evil plans!

The wicked brag about their deepest desires.

Those greedy people hate and curse you, LORD.

The wicked are too proud to turn to you or even think about you.

They are always successful, though they can't understand your teachings,

and they keep sneering at their enemies.

In their hearts they say, "Nothing can hurt us!

We'll always be happy and free from trouble."

They curse and tell lies, and all they talk about

is how to be cruel or how to do wrong.

They hide outside villages, waiting to strike and murder some innocent victim.

They are hungry lions hiding in the bushes,

hoping to catch some helpless passerby.

They trap the poor in nets and drag them away.

They crouch down and wait to grab a victim.

They say, "God can't see! He's got on a blindfold."

Do something, LORD God, and use your powerful arm to help those in need.

The wicked don't respect you.

In their hearts they say, "God won't punish us!"

But you see the trouble and the distress, and you will do something.

The poor can count on you, and so can orphans.

Now break the arms of all merciless people.

Punish them for doing wrong and make them stop.

6 Sermon, March 11, 2011

Our LORD, you will always rule, but nations will vanish from the earth.

You listen to the longings of those who suffer.

You offer them hope, and you pay attention to their cries for help.

You defend orphans and everyone else in need,

so that no one on earth can terrify others again. (Psalm 10:1-18)

Social work in Raipur.

When he built his home, he employed a carpenter who was untested on a big project like that.

“ Nobody knew His secret ambition Nobody knew His claim to fame He broke the old rules steeped in tradition He tore the Holy Veil away Questioning those in powerful position Running to those who called His name (But) Nobody knew His secret ambition Was to give His life away.

” Michael W. Smith, "Secret Ambition" on *I 2 Eye* © 1989.