



northminster presbyterian church

2400 old alabama road
roswell, georgia 30076

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SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 4:12-16 Mark 10:32-45

SERMON: Daring Not Boring (Rev. Dr. Jim Simpson)

The main reason Jesus is difficult and demanding is that Jesus' way runs counter to the world's way. Like those first disciples, we are prone to misunderstand and confuse Jesus' peculiar way of salvation. Yet as with the first disciples, Jesus keeps on working with us, keeps on teaching us, keeps on nudging us in the correct direction; towards living the kingdom life to which God calls us.

Poor James and John. *Are they deaf or crazy or stupid or stubborn?* They hear Jesus describe in some detail all that is about to happen: suffering and death. And still they ask for two seats in the Presidential Box! Jesus is moving inexorably toward his final agony and humiliation and the disciples are still talking about power and glory - *their own power and glory!*

We talk about Jesus as our Teacher, and Jesus was and is that and more. Jesus as a teacher is never solely interested in leading people from point "a" to point "b". Jesus was and Jesus is all about opening up minds that were formerly closed, all about trying to get people to see the world in a different way, all about changing people's behavior, changing lives – *inside and out!* Jesus is all about teaching, sharing, living, embodying, dying and rising a new way of living, with a whole new set of priorities!

If all we expect from a sermon is hearing some new nugget of information about Jesus, then both preaching and listening to sermons would be easy. But when we recall that the goal of preaching, both for the preacher and the congregation, is to see lives changed, every sermon is a challenge for speaker and listener.

When Jesus spoke in riddles and parables *the disciples didn't get it!* They demanded Jesus give it to them straight; *they still didn't get it!* Even when Jesus describes what will soon happen to Him, and it is not a pretty picture, they engage in selective listening and remain unmoved.

Jesus describes how He will be betrayed, rejected, killed, and rise again, with all the emotion and sincerity that accompanied these words. Even this does not penetrate the firewall the disciples have erected to protect themselves! The disciples had signed on with Jesus for glory; but now Jesus talks to them of the way of the cross.

Just maybe the disciples' real problem is in fact also *our real problem*. It's not that they/we don't understand what Jesus is all about; it's more that understanding what Jesus was all about, they/we didn't like what Jesus is all about. They/we don't like it and so they/we twist Jesus' words in such a way, that just maybe everything would come out right and they/we would come out smelling of roses.

Let's be very clear, honest and upfront with each other and with any who come here seeking a church home. *Jesus' way is a way that not many people really want to follow*. It is bad enough that Jesus says that he is headed to a cross, but then Jesus adds that every prospective disciple must also travel in the very same way! As Mark Twain once said, "It's not what I don't understand in the Bible that bothers me; it's what I understand all too well."

Sometimes, we come to church expecting that there we will have our faith confirmed. We will be able to listen to the sermon, nod, and say to ourselves, "Yes, that's what I've always thought. That's how I've always seen it." And then we can go home and have lunch. Yet, today's Gospel reading offers us a startling reminder that the gospel of Jesus is considerably more dissonant and demanding! Jesus' Gospel contains a close critique of our unexamined lives; a challenge to a whole new way of living; while also providing the promise of God's love working in us to renew us, to change us and so allow us to share God's Good news everywhere we go.

The truth of Jesus' Gospel is such that *none of us ever fully gets it*. Thanks be to God - the point is not so much that we need to get it, *but to be sure that it gets us!* Held in the loving embrace of God's love we can stick with Jesus, and let Jesus keep talking to us and teaching us and changing us. This is why we should approach Sunday worship and indeed all of life, expecting to meet Jesus, expecting to be surprised, expecting to grow, expecting to be criticized and challenged and changed by Jesus and so enabled to grow in faith and love and grace.

One thing we can never say about Jesus is that He is *boring*. Jesus' teaching is always challenging, strange, off-putting, *but never boring*. My friends, to the extent that we actively pay attention, listen, focus; to the extent that we will willingly unstop our ears, open our eyes, put our brains in gear; Jesus can break into our lives. As we release the brakes on all our senses and emotions, and fully engage our thoughts and feelings - Jesus comes challenging us, engaging us, enraging us, and loving us!

The case can be made that boredom is that modern condition that is the very opposite of life itself. Preacher and author, Fred Craddock has noted how Christians enjoy having our boredom relieved through interesting times in church. He writes, "Sincere Sunday worshipers will confess to welcoming in muffled celebration any interruption of the funeral droning. Be honest. Have you ever quietly cheered when a child fell off a pew, a bird flew in a window, the lights went out, the organ wheezed, the sound system picked up police calls, or a dog came down the aisle and curled up to sleep below the pulpit?"

An old country preacher had a teenage son, and it was getting time the boy should give some thought to choosing a profession. Like many young men, the boy didn't really know what he wanted to do, and he didn't seem too concerned about it. One day, while the boy was away at school, his father decided to try an experiment. He went into the boy's room and placed on his study table three objects: a Bible, a silver dollar, and a bottle of whisky. "I'll just hide behind the door," the old preacher said to himself, "and when he comes home from school this afternoon, I'll see which object he picks up. If it's the Bible, he's going to be a preacher like me, and what a blessing that would be! If he picks up the dollar, he's going to be a businessman, and that would be okay, too. But if he picks up the bottle, he's going to be a no-good drunkard, and, what a shame that would be." The old man waited anxiously, and soon heard his son's footsteps as he entered the house whistling and headed for his room. He tossed his books on the bed, and as he turned to leave the room he spotted the objects on the table. With curiosity in his eye, he walked over to inspect them. Finally, he picked up the Bible and placed it under his arm. He picked up the silver dollar and dropped it into his pocket. He uncorked the bottle and took a big swig. "Have mercy," the old man whispered, "he's gonna be a Congressman!"

What choices will you make?

This is the Day to take hold of the faith you have, the faith you were taught, the faith you, yourself, have forged, the faith with which you have been gifted and to set out in faith - determined to keep close to Jesus as you move forward in your Christian life.

This is the Day to be convinced that God needs you. My friends, *God needs you, God has a life for you to live!* God needs all of us to be committed to the way of the cross. As you live out this calling you will positively impact each other's lives and the lives of many other people through the mission and ministry of this church.

This is the Day to identify the very next step you will take in your life and faith. So what you can do is this: before you depart from this fellowship today identify one decision, one choice, one change that you will make and expect God to make in your life in the next week or month. And then go strengthened to live that changed life.

What are you ready to pick up?

This is the Day to accept the challenge of living gratefully, gladly, generously! Please be aware, be very aware that your life is blessed by God, that you are a beloved child of God, that you are a follower of Jesus Christ, that to you the Holy Spirit brings comfort and counsel. And so live gratefully – thankful for all the great gifts of God present in our life, in the life of your family, in the life of the world. Live gladly – assured that life and love will always trump death and despair. Live generously – by putting into action that great truth, that all you have belongs to God. Do this by giving to God and God's work through our church a realistic, responsible, rightful proportion of your time, your talent and your treasure.

This is the Day to embrace this church community as your home, and our home! Embrace and be embraced by this church family so you can welcome all who will be drawn here. Be at home by valuing each other, allow love and forgiveness to shape your relationships. Be at home that prayer and worship will both thrill us and change us. Be at home, where serving others will define what we aim to be at our very best.

This is the Day for serving, for seeing that your life can best be described or defined by the importance you place on what it means for you to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

This is the Day for serving Jesus, the Servant Lord and King. This is the Day for serving as we share the Message of good news to the poor. This is the Day for serving by announce pardon to those in prison. This is the Day for serving as we offer sight to the blind. This is the Day for serving so that the burdened and the battered can go free. This is the Day for serving by announcing, "This is God's year to act!"

This is the Day for serving! "This is God's year to act!" Make it a priority to be here next week prepared to enter on your 2007 Pledge Card the amount that represents a realistic, responsible, rightful proportion of all that with which God has blessed you. This is the Day for serving! "This is God's year to act!" God has much for us to do and be – God needs much from us. *Northminster, it is time to be daring not boring! Amen.*

Hebrews 4:12-16

12Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. **13**And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account. **14**Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. **15**For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. **16**Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Mark 10:32-45

32They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, **33**saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; **34**they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again." **35**James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." **36**And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" **37**And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." **38**But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" **39**They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; **40**but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for

those for whom it has been prepared.” 41When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. 42So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 43But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

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