

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham  
The Rev. Dr. John Judson  
October 11, 2009  
Mark 10:17-31  
“The Never Ending journey”

It was a bet I was bound to lose. Every year while we were living in the panhandle of Texas and would drive to San Antonio for Christmas, Cindy and I would make a bet about when it would begin. Now the first part of our trip was always pretty easy, and it never showed up. The children were young and so we would get them up early in the morning still in their pajamas. We would bundle them into the car and then we would head out before sunrise. As the light was breaking from the East out across the prairie we would make our first stop for breakfast usually at a McDonald's. We would change the children into their clothes give them something to eat and continue our journey. The rest of the morning was pretty good as they would play with their toys or read a book and it was never on the horizon. Lunch was usually again at McDonald's. Then the bet would really begin. We would wait for it to show up; for the moment when one our children would ask "are we there yet?" Unfortunately I always figured the children would wait longer than they did and so Cindy always won. She seemed to have this instinct as to know when it would be asked.

Are we there yet? That was the same question the man in Jesus story was asking. He was not asking the question in a geographical sense, but in a theological sense. He wanted to know if he was there yet, if he had achieved salvation; if he had done enough to be saved. In the era in which Jesus was preaching and teaching people believed that they reached salvation by being righteous, meaning that they were obedient to God's laws. We see this in our story through Jesus' response to the man's inquiry. Jesus asks him if he knows the Commandments. The man replies, "I have kept all of these since my youth." In other words, he thinks he has been good enough to have arrived. Jesus appreciates the young man's quest. We know this because Mark tells us that Jesus loved this man...which is why Jesus makes him the offer of a lifetime.

So what is this offer of a lifetime? This offer of a lifetime is the opportunity for this man to give away all of his money and to follow after Jesus. How can you beat that? Wouldn't we all love to have this kind of an offer? Well, probably not. In fact this is usually where most of us quit reading the story. As soon as Jesus tells this man that he needs to give up all of his money we come to a screeching halt. We stop, because Jesus scares us. So what we do is engage in some exegetical gymnastics trying to prove that Jesus would only ask this man and not any of us to give up our money. What we don't see in this passage however is that giving up the money is the easy part. If you really want to be scared what you need to do is look at what follows; in other words, following Jesus. I say this because following Jesus according to this story means giving up far more than your money. Peter tells us what following Jesus looks like. In verse 28 Peter began to say to Jesus, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." And by everything Peter means houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, children and businesses. He

means everything. Scared yet? Yea, me too. So my guess is most of us are a bit skeptical that this offer from Jesus is really one made out of love for this man.

What I want to offer you this morning, then is a fresh look at this story to show you why I really do believe that this is an offer made to this man out of love. It is an offer made out of love because what Jesus is offering this man is the opportunity to become one of the great heroes of the faith. I say that because all of the great heroes of God's people are those who have been willing to give up safety and go adventuring. Look at those that we most admire in the Scriptures. Abram and Sarah: Abraham and Sarah are living in a far distant land. They have everything they need, yet God says, get up and go to this place that I will show you. You won't know where it is until you reach it. This is adventure Moses. Moses had a wife, children and a great job shepherding sheep. Yet God comes to him and says listen Moses, you need to give all of this up. Go and set my people free. That is adventuring. Look at Joshua. Joshua was second in command to Moses, they are in the verge of coming into the promise land and God says well Moses can't go but you will and you will lead this rag tag bunch of people and to conquer the land. That is adventuring. Then there is Nehemiah. Nehemiah is probably the least known of these men and women. And yet he was willing to give up a cushy job in the Persian Empire to return and rebuild Jerusalem in the face of great opposition. That was adventuring. These great heroes of God's people all left safety behind and went to adventure. This was the offer Jesus was making.

I realize that many of us are not adventurers at heart. I've realized this when I tell people about our daughter Katie and her new adventures in Cambodia in the Peace Corps. When I tell people that she has been living without running water, electricity, sanitation and lives in a place where you eat fried ants and there are spiders as big as your hands, most people admit, that that would not be for them. We are a people who love safety. Yet, I want you to consider something and that is the fact that we would not be here, unless a group of people 175 years ago, decided to go at adventuring. In 1834, Michigan was not even a state. It was a territory. It was frontier. It was on the edge of nowhere. Only 20 years before the city had been fought over in the war of 1812. Before that it had been burned to the ground. So the people who were here decided on adventure over safety. This adventuring was not only for themselves, but for God. And so in the midst of this place, they founded a church...in a barn. They didn't have a lot of money. They didn't have many resources, and yet they were willing to go on this amazing adventure for God to create a Presbyterian Church. And over the past 175 years this church has again and again chosen adventure over safety including this new sanctuary and beautiful organ.

Are we there yet? That was the question my children would ask me. And as most of you know it can be a rather frustrating one when it gets asked too many times. So on one of our trips as we were cruising down the flat plains of West Texas and Andy asked, are we there yet, I replied, no. And we never will be. You can imagine the surprise that the answer evoked. Even Cindy looked at me. I said no, we will never be there, because we are always here. Which means, I continued, that we will never be there, we always, only be here. In a sense, that is the way I look at the life of this church and at the life of faith. Faith is a journey in which we will never be

there. We will always be here, meaning there is always another place where God wants us to go; there is more of the journey ahead. That is the invitation that Jesus made to the man and makes to us. We get to follow Jesus, leaving behind what was is, so we can create what will be. So this is what I would like you to do for this week. For those of you who are new here each week, I give a challenge to the congregation with which they are to wrestle over the coming week. But this week I'm going to give you a task on your bullet someplace. I want you to write down this date, October 11, 2014; 5 years from now which will be our 180th anniversary. Then during this week, I want you to take some time and imagine that you are at that time and that you are looking back over what has happened at First Presbyterian Church. Then I want you to write down the best, the most amazing thing that this church has done in the past five years; what adventure has God led us on as a congregation. Then, I want you to e-mail it to me, and we are going to make a list of these visions and put them around the church and see if maybe God isn't indeed calling us to adventure in one of those ways.