

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
THE WORSHIP OF GOD • MAY 10, 2020
“BRAVING THE WILDERNESS”

The Litany
Based on Psalm 119

We follow steadfastly in the ways of God.

We are happy when we wholeheartedly seek God’s decrees.

Along the path, God will not forsake us.

We will praise with an upright heart and keep the righteous ways.

When our souls are weary, God will strengthen us.

We are consumed with longing for the voice of God.

Precious Lord, your hands made and formed us.

Take our hands as we lovingly lift them to you.

Song of Focus
A Leap of Faith
Words and Music by Ed Varnum

1. In the book of Genesis, a man named Abraham was very rich in a place called Ur where he owned lots of land. One day, he said to Sarah, “It’s time to move, my dear.” She said, “I don’t think so, Abe, I kinda like it here!”

Then Sarah said to Abraham, “You want to go? But where?”
“I’m not sure, but the Lord told me I’d know when I got there.”
Sarah did not say, “There is no way! Too much of a risk to take.”
She had his back and helped him pack. They knew it’s time to make
A LEAP OF FAITH.

2. Moses was out tending sheep and saw a bush aflame. From the bush a voice cried out, calling Moses by his name. He came near in wonder at the sight and at the sound. The voice said, “Shed the sandals, Moe. You stand on holy ground!”

The voice said, “Go see Pharaoh. Tell him, ‘Let my people go!’”
“But Lord, I am not up to that! It’s big! I just don’t know.”
“Never fear, Moses, I am here, but the first step is yours to take.
“Get going, Moe! It’s time to go! This is your time to make
A LEAP OF FAITH.”

3. The disciples saw their Lord and Master dying on a cross.

So, the disciples hid in fear, thinking all was lost.
But then they saw the one who died now living for their sake,
Saying, “Go for me into the world. I’m with you as you make
THIS LEAP OF FAITH.”

You might know next steps to take, but still must cross a line,
and wonder if it’s worth the risk, thinking, “Hey, got lots of time!”
But do you hear God’s call to a future where Christ waits?
You’ve pondered and you’ve wondered, tell me, is it time to make
A LEAP OF FAITH?

If Christ has called you, God is with you. Now’s the time to make
A LEAP OF FAITH.

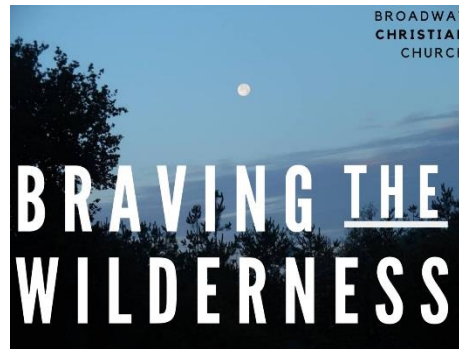
The Scripture **John 21:1-7**

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea.

The Message ***Braving the Wilderness: Jumping*** **Mark Briley**

Synopsis: How many times have you stood at the edge of something from which you were expected to jump? Do you know that feeling of hesitation? It sure is nice to have your feet planted on the ground. You take the leap and uncertainty floods your body as any sense of control disappears. It’s no wonder that jumping, in this sense, is a fear many hold. No matter how many times you listen to Van Halen sing, “*You might as well jump!*” – that natural instinct still whispers to you, “*Stay where you are. Stay in control. Don’t jump!*” Jesus died. He was properly buried. He rose from the dead. Peter has ridden this roller coaster with him... and not always that well. But he pushed off from

the beach in his all-too-familiar boat, he spots Jesus on the shore. And without missing a beat, he jumps. He's ready to brave the wilderness. Are you?



I love my mother. Her genuine faith and heart to serve is unmatched. I repeat – unmatched. To know her truly and deeply and to truly and deeply be known by her is among the greatest gifts of my life. Here she is mothering me in my early years. I'm not one to post much on social media, but I posted this picture a couple of Mother's Day's ago with the caption – *"She introduced me to cake and Jesus. I think we're in good shape. No better momma! Much love..."* It is Mother's Day and I wish all of the mothers, step-mothers, foster-mothers, adopted-mothers, mother-figures, she's-the-mother-I-never-had's, and every other configuration of mother out there a very happy Mother's Day.



Mother's Day wasn't a thing when Jesus walked the earth, but I think he'd be in favor of it. He and Mary had this amazing bond – his birth, his death, his re-birth – all moments they shared more intensely than any other combination of humans. I think he would send her a card, buy her flowers, take her out to Red Lobster, and craft a hand-made end table or something as a gift – he was a carpenter after all and mom's cherish all the stuff their kids make for them. Right?

In all the joy of the occasion, I also want to acknowledge upfront that this day is a mixed bag for some of us. This day can bring sadness, heartache, even anger – the gamut of emotions – as relationships shift, moms or children drift, or as death and loss find us all. Whatever the state of your relationship with this day, may you find in this space, peace and grace enough to hold all of our emotion and feeling before God, knowing God can handle it – not only *can* but *longs* to hold it with us. You're not alone in your experience. As the Rolling Stones famously sang in 1989, *"You're not the only one with mixed emotions. You're not the only ship adrift on this ocean."* And their solution to that reality may not be my recommendation, but the human experience? – always diverse, always unique, and yet strangely and in so many ways – the same as everyone else.

I was surprised to learn that one of those common experiences is wrapped up in a quote from which I could not find its source. The quote? "*Most of us have only a dozen or so genuinely interesting moments in our lives; the rest is filler.*" Do you think that's true? I don't know if it is. It kind of bummed me out. If it is true, I wondered to myself, "*How many have I had? How many do I have left?*"

Interesting moments. I suppose these are the moments we tell our grandkids about... how we met grandma, the time we broke a leg, the job that moved us out of state, the health scare, the big win, the moment we learned our brother wasn't coming home from the war. Interesting moments? Life-shaping moments? Who's to say we're only allotted a dozen in a lifetime?

What we do know, however, is that Peter and the disciples were coming off the most interesting, death-defying moment of their lives so far. Jesus – dead. Jesus – buried. Jesus – alive again. This season in their lives surely made the cut of stories they hoped to tell their grandkids one day. We call this season Eastertide – the "*so what?*" season following Easter. Now that Easter has happened, and everything is different, what are we supposed to do? For us, this may strangely parallel this "*coming out of quarantine*" season. It's a new wilderness. What are we supposed to do now?

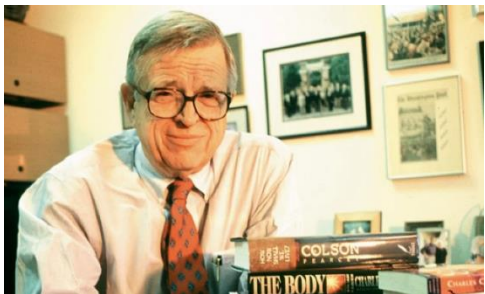
The disciples were wondering. Is it all over? I mean, Jesus did *it* after all. Was that the capstone of their season with Jesus? Could they have really known how they would, or even *if* they would, carry the ministry forward? How would they brave this new wilderness? This is the question we're carrying into a new series we're calling "*Braving the Wilderness.*" We're going to look at how the Disciples ventured into life post-Easter and how such may parallel the experience of our new normal as we venture into a new chapter of our lives navigating the impact of a global pandemic. What the disciples went through... and what we're going through... is exhausting. And we have all the questions. Can we really move forward together? Will we do it right? Will we try things too soon? Too late? Not at all? Can we ever look at each other the same again?

The whole thing is exhausting isn't it? And it's exhausting because we care. To get that feel, journey back with me to the *week* after the crucifixion and resurrection – the season where Peter and the gang are living – and the instant replay is playing in high speed. Peter's elated that the resurrection has occurred, we presume, but he's got to be critical of his own actions through the whole thing – the betrayal, his absence from his leader and friend's dying moment, his confusion about all that occurred after. I'd say Easter hang-over is fitting for how he must be feeling. And what do you do when you feel like that? You do what you know you can do. You do what makes you comfortable. You get off the couch and attempt to utilize a different muscle group than the one that's tearing you down into a depressive state. For Peter, you grab the tackle gear, fill the cooler, and hit the boat. It's time to drop a line... or a net as it were.

It was evening. Nighttime was the best fishing. My son has often asked me, “*When can we go night fishing, Dad?*” I’m not sure why he’s smitten with the idea, but maybe he knows something I don’t. It was certainly considered the most productive time to fish in the Sea of Galilee or Lake Tiberias as it is also called. W.M. Thomson, author and one who’s witnessed night fishing on that very sea, described it beautifully, “*With blazing torch, the boat slides over the flashing sea, and the men stand gazing keenly into it until their prey is sighted, when, quick as lightning, they fling their net or fly their spear.*” As effective as it can be, he also wrote: “*[It isn’t uncommon, however,] to see the tired fishermen come sullenly into harbor in the morning, having toiled all night in vain.*”¹

Peter and the disciples set offshore for the night... probably good to have the space from even the very land that caused such recent strife. Much of their efforts were probably routine and silent – the kind of work you can do even when your mind’s not all there. They’ve navigated the seas many times. They know their strengths and likes – who handles the nets best, who steers the boat, and so on.

There was surely plenty of conversation about all that had transpired with Jesus since the previous Thursday when they had such a lovely Passover meal together before everything hit the proverbial fan. “*Where did you hide?*” one of them probably asked. “*Did you think about trying to get up to Golgotha on Friday?*” Someone may have even said, “*I feel terrible about Judas. I can’t imagine how lonely he must have felt at the end.*” At some point the convo shifts to the shock of the resurrection and the times Jesus had shown up in their presence sense – through the locked door where they had gathered as it were. “*Can you believe it?*” they surely said in a hundred different ways. “*The media is going to eat us alive; don’t you think? They’ll cry, ‘Fake news!’*” “*We all saw him, right? You touched him, John? Thomas, you believe it now, right?*” When you’ve been through as much as these guys have, you can easily doubt your experiences. Whether they knew they could or would hold strong on this for the rest of time was surely uncertain at that moment. But they sure did.



Chuck Colson was the first person imprisoned as part of the Watergate scandal under President Nixon’s administration. Colson wasn’t a professing Christian until he found faith while serving seven months in prison – part of what led him to begin Prison Fellowship, a ministry that encouraged and supported faith among inmates. He said this about the resurrection. “*I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead; then they proclaimed that truth for forty years, never once denying it. Every one [of them] was beaten, tortured, stoned, and*

¹ Exegetical support including the fishing stories about the Sea of Galilee come from William Barclay’s commentary: “The Letters to the Corinthians.” Westminster Press. 1975.

put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world, and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.”²

Whatever your take, this post-resurrection fishing account is a fascinating story that we find only in John’s gospel. It was as if the writer wanted us to see, to feel, to know for sure that the resurrection was real; that Jesus, in the flesh, walked among them again. He could make a fire. He could charbroil the fish. He could eat it and offer a lasting word to those left to carry the momentum forward. I’m so glad this story is here. Stories have a way of relaying truth that we can’t otherwise grasp in a simple benign description of anything. “*Jesus was raised. Believe it. Onward and upward.*” Nope. That doesn’t cut it. We need to feel it, experience it, so we can, in turn, live it ourselves.

Dr. Brene Brown, author and social-research professor at the University of Houston, inspired the title of our new sermon series, *Braving the Wilderness*.³ Some of her work from that book will show up in the series. She points to J.K. Rowling, author of the *Harry Potter* books she loves so much, as her go-to person when she’s struggling with how to introduce a new and strange world of ideas that has only just emerged from her research. “*I imagine J.K. telling me,*” she writes: “*New worlds are important, but you can’t just describe them. Give us the stories that make up that universe. No matter how wild and weird the new world might be, we’ll see ourselves in the stories.*” This, indeed, is the point of Scripture itself. To hear the stories of our faith so that we can ultimately see ourselves in those very stories.

And so, we try to capture the feel of the boat that night. It must have been good for the soul even if the catch was a bust. But then, daybreak. A voice from the beach. “*No luck, fellas? Try the other side.*” Now, if you want to tick off a professional fisherman, who’s caught nothing all night long, make the bonehead comment of, “*You tried the other side?*”

Right? But that’s not what’s happening here. H.V. Morton, another person who’s traversed the fishing scene on the Sea of Galilee said he once saw two men fishing on the shores of the lake. One had waded out from the shore and was casting a bell-net into the water. “*But time after time the net came up empty,*” he wrote. “*It was a beautiful sight to see him casting. Each time the neatly folded net belled out in the air and fell so precisely on the water that the small lead weights hit the lake at the same moment making a thin circular splash. While the fisher in the water was waiting for another cast, the other man shouted to him from the bank to fling to the left, which he instantly did. This time he was successful.*”

² <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/555921-i-know-the-resurrection-is-a-fact-and-watergate-proved>. The Colson quote can be found in any number of places. This link is one such place.

³ *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone*. Dr. Brene Brown. Random House Publishing. New York. 2017. The title for this sermon series is inspired by Brown’s work. While some references will be utilized during the series, the series itself is not directly based on the contents of her book.

This was common practice as the vantage point from the shore often allowed a broader and better view of the schools of fish. John doesn't suggest this as a miracle of Jesus, which also affirms this common practice of fish spotting from the shore.

SIDENOTE – or tributary as I like to think of it – the haul of fish that the disciples catch? “153 fish” John says, is beautiful symbolism. Many have made remarks about the catch – it's so specific, some say, to verify the account. But I like the take of historian and early church theologian, Jerome, who said that in the sea at that time, there was believed to be 153 different kinds of fish; and that the catch in the disciple's net is one which includes every kind of fish, and therefore the number symbolizes the idea that someday, people of all nations will be gathered together in Jesus Christ. Isn't that beautiful? I like that explanation even if that's reading into the simple net-catch for the day. But the breakfast on the beach, the imperatives of Jesus, we'll leave for next week.

Today, I just want us to get into the head of Peter in this moment of realization. The voice from the beach hollers to cast the net off the other side. They do. The catch nets 153 fish and that's all well and good. But John hasn't removed his gaze from the shoreline. Was it the voice? Was it the way the man held himself? Who's to say but John believes, he always does, and he nudges Peter who was probably like, “*I'm busy here, dude. A little help with the catch would be nice. Pivot! Pivot!*” But John elbows him again and says, “*No, Pete... Pete... I'll be darned. It's Jesus.*”

Peter's impulsive. You don't have to tell him twice. All the emotion that he's held about his interactions with Jesus and the events surrounding his death have culminated in this moment, this (*perhaps*) perceived second chance... to make amends, to express sorrow and joy and regret and redemption all at the same time. He's ready to jump!



In my mind, Van Halen's “*Jump!*” is playing in the background – just for effect. Do you know the lyrics? Interesting overlay to this moment between Peter and Jesus ... the hardships they've just been through... the processing... the wondering about a path forward. Through the vocals of David Lee Roth – Van Halen lead singer, listen to the words:

*I get up, and nothing gets me down.
You got it tough. I've seen the toughest all around.
And I know just how you feel.
You've got to roll with the punches to get to what's real
How you been?
You say you don't know, you won't know until you begin.
Well can't you see me standing here,*

*I've got my back against the record machine
I ain't the worst that you've seen.
Oh can't you see what I mean?
Might as well jump. Jump!*

I'm sure such wasn't Van Halen's inspiration, but I can feel it here.⁴ And Peter? Well, he's a might-as-well-jump kind of guy. If you've ever longed for one more shot to stand before someone you love; someone with whom you've left unfinished business; or longed for one more shot to say the right thing, be the right thing, hold and heal that relationship one more time... then you know what's stirring in Peter's gut. Peter does have enough wits about him to get dressed first. The text sounds weird – why would anyone fish naked? Such is not likely the case exactly. He would have had on a loin cloth, as fishermen always did when they were working. But it was Jewish law that to offer a greeting to another person was to carry out a religious act. And to carry out a religious act, you had to be fully clothed. So, Peter, before he leapt after Jesus, put on his fisherman's tunic because he wanted to greet his Lord faithfully. And then... you might as well jump! Jump! And he does.

So what? Peter jumps. What does that have to do with you and me? Well... that's *always* up to you and me. It may mean nothing to you. You can leave the story here and move on with your life as if it doesn't matter at all. Or... you can imagine your own jump. Every once in a while, you experience something that changes you forever. Maybe it's connected to those dozen, or 20, or 153 interesting moments in your life that alter your existence or that of another. It may be this quarantined experience and how you don't want to feel like it was wasted time – what good change in your own life can come from this crisis? Where do you need to take a leap of faith? Where do you need to take a "*leap to faith*" as Soren Kierkegaard was apt to say? To be faithful... to carry on the mission Jesus set into motion, we're going to have to jump right in, be the embodied presence of Christ in the world. Maybe it's offering your heart again... that chance to get in front of Jesus and say, "*I'm done with the mediocre pattern of my life. I want to start again. I want to be cleansed of the weight of my past and be freed to the future you imagine for me.*"

Maybe it's healing a relationship. Maybe it's listening to that desperate plea coming from your household right now asking for you to show up to the moment for real. Show up to your true self. Show up in a way that says, "*I hear you. I see you. I trust what you're saying about me and who you know I can be yet.*"

Now that's courageous. Jump, jump! How will you jump? May the quest ahead of us all be full of moments we can't wait to tell our grandkids about.

⁴ This use is not an endorsement of Van Halen but simply a cultural overlay that I found compelling given the context of this message.