

BECAUSE OF CHRIST, EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED:

Dying To Live

Luke 9:18-27

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/because-of-christ-everything-has-changed-dying-to-live/>

We are launching a new sermon series today titled “Because of Christ, everything has changed.” This series is the second in a series of sermons related to our Setting Sail visioning process. Over the past two years we have prayed and dreamed together about what God is calling us to be and do and now we are launching out in faith and in the power of the Holy Spirit, setting sail in obedience and anticipation of God’s dreams for us.

Today we begin our focus on Life-Changing Faith. Our preferred future is that First Baptist Church leads every person to follow the Way of Christ, discover their giftedness, and experience continual life transformation. All generations are rooted in a Biblical, hope-filled faith and experience the joy and significance of service.

In short, we follow Christ.

And because of Christ, everything has changed. Well, most of it has changed. I mean, a good percentage has changed. Okay, well maybe not a lot has changed but way more than Susie or Ted. I mean, talk about zero change.

Change is hard. It doesn’t matter if the change is on the menu at your favorite restaurant or if the change involves your career or if the change involves following Jesus. Change is hard. Even when we know we need the change or it will be good for us.

Even when we are tired of going around and around in circles in our lives never able to get where we want to go. Kind of like this poor family. (VIDEO)

Honestly, I could have just filmed at one of our new roundabouts in town and gotten nearly the same footage.

Sometimes life feels like this ... that we are stuck in a roundabout, going in circles, trapped, unable to get where we want or need to go. We can see the kind of life we were made to have but we can’t seem to get there.

Let’s talk ego for a few minutes. Can we do that? Is this room big enough?

What is ego? When we hear the word “ego”, I think many of us by default picture some loud, obnoxious, arrogant bully. We think of pride or someone who thinks too highly of themselves. “That guy has such an ego.” or “She is so egotistical.” If you read that today’s sermon was about

dying to ego, you may have thought - "Well at least I don't have to worry about that. I don't even like myself so I don't have an ego issue." But ego is really about self. In Latin, it literally just means "I." Me. Ego is self. It is a person's obsession with or focus on self - whether we think highly of ourselves or not. The question really is - how often are we thinking about our self or how something impacts us or how someone else feels about us? How often are our actions centered on us and about us? I heard a stat once that 8 out of 10 people in a room are primarily thinking about what others think about them. And that simple statement bolsters my confidence when I go to an event because my odds are great that no one is thinking about me because they are too busy worrying about themselves to even notice how awkward I am. Whether you think highly of yourself or you don't think highly of yourself at all, there is still an insatiable hunger that demands to be fed.

A week ago I was playing some basketball with my nephew and we were working on layups. I told him to picture the white square above the basket as this hungry, greedy monster that needs to be fed. And he loves, he demands basketballs. When you are going for the layup, go up strong and hard and place that basketball into its growling mouth. Well, this mostly made my nephew laugh, especially as I became animated and gave voice to the monster.

Our ego is a hungry, greedy monster constantly demanding to be fed. Overcoming our ego isn't getting over our pride or an inflated sense of our own importance and abilities; it's just simply getting over ourselves. It is realizing that life isn't about us. Which isn't really simple at all and it impacts each one of us in this room. We all struggle with ego. People with ego problems are not "those people" but rather "us people." You and me. Pastors and Christian leaders struggle just as epically with the subtle seductions of the ego in regards to success and worth. There have been quite a few pastors in the news as of late who have left or been removed from leadership because of false measures of success and the vicious cycle to keep up with those measures. A recent survey reports that nearly 1,200 pastors leave ministry every month because they are tired of the roundabout.

So we won't pretend this morning that overcoming our ego is easy. I won't stand up here and pretend I don't struggle with an obsession with self; that I don't secretly desire for you to think I'm all that so I can maybe believe I am loved and I am worthy. We won't lie to ourselves about who is driving our lives.

Because the reason our lives seem to go in circles with no real progress is because there is this crazy person behind the wheel. And his name is Ego. We hand over the keys and let ego drive us. We just go in circles never arriving. The problem with getting stuck in a round about is that sometimes you are tricked into thinking you are making progress because you are moving. That is a seductive lie. The truth is we are stuck and missing out on the life God dreams for God's children. We see the road marked "Freedom" but can't find the exit because our ego takes off in another direction convincing us that freedom is just up ahead. We see the road marked "Love" but Ego takes a different route that turns out to be yet another lane in the crazy roundabout. We see the road marked "Peace" but other have us hemmed in and our ego can't find a way past them so we settle for the same going-nowhere path. Our devotion to ego leads

us into this circle of insanity where we do the same thing over and over and over yet expecting different results.

So how do we find our way out? How do we exit this way for a better way?

A couple of years ago I flew to Atlanta for a meeting, and like a lot of urban cities, there is a pretty healthy public transit system in place that you can use rather than renting a car and dealing with traffic or parking. After my plane landed, I rode the Marta train in from the airport to the downtown area and switch a couple of lines with success before arriving at the station that I knew was nearest my hotel. I had memorized beforehand the directions so that once I exited the station onto the streets I would know what direction to turn in order to walk the few blocks to my hotel and not look like a total tourist other than the rolling suitcase I was pulling by outdoor eating venues late in the evening. When I passed the same eating venue for the third time, I had to admit something to myself. I had no idea how to get where I needed to go. I thought I did but I didn't. So I could keep circling the block with my belongings hoping that somehow the hotel would pull itself up off its foundation and come meet me or I could admit my way wasn't working and that I needed someone to show me the way.

Some of us this morning need to admit that we don't know the way. That we keep traveling the same, tired blocks like a dog chasing its tail and, in the words of U2, we still haven't found what we're looking for. "It is possible to lead a wholesome life by western Christianity standards – one in which we maintain a job, marry a person we love, have children, bury our parents and attend the church of our choice - and still miss out on what Jesus promised we could have."

So how do we exit the roundabout? It begins with confessing that we've been letting our ego drive. That we are self-absorbed and self-centered. That we are more concerned with and more committed to our selves than we are to Christ and we need to repent. Thomas Keating writes that, repentance means "to change the way in which you are looking for happiness." We need to hand over the keys to the car or ask God to pry them from our fingers despite our protest and then find a way to trust that God knows the way to freedom, to real happiness. Not an easy way and not a shortcut but the way that leads to real life. Not fake life or life warmed over but authentic life.

Maybe we are hesitant to give over the keys because, if we are honest, we don't trust Jesus. Over the last few chapters, Luke has been setting up for the reader who exactly Jesus is! In chapter seven, after Jesus forgave the woman in sin who interrupted his dinner with the Pharisees, they asked among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" (Luke 7:49)

In chapter 8 after Jesus calmed the storm, the disciples said to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?" (Luke 8:25). Earlier in chapter 9, Herod asked, "Who is this about whom I hear such things?" So everyone he came across (the Pharisees, the disciples, and Herod) were perplexed at who Jesus was.

The time had come for Jesus to pull them aside and make clear not only who He was, but what was in store for him - and what is in store for us if we choose to follow him.

The question for you this morning might be “Who do you say Jesus is?” Your honest answer to that question will determine so much in your life and whether you can hand over the keys.

The Asaro tribe of Indonesia and Papua New Guinea has a beautiful saying, “Knowledge is only a rumor until it lives in the muscle.” What we understand and learn about Jesus is only rumor to us until we live it and integrate it so it becomes part of us. So our answer this morning to the question, “Who do you say Jesus is?” cannot be an intellectual answer or an answer of the mind. It has to be an answer of the heart.

If Jesus were to ask you, “who do you say I am?” what would be the response of your heart? Not the Sunday School answers nor the cliché answers but rather the answer that comes when your feet are held to the fire or your heart is shattered in pieces or your life is on the line or in the quiet when your ego says you aren’t enough. Do you trust that Jesus died for you? Can you trust that God has forgiven you? Do you trust that Jesus loves you?

Jesus’ redemptive love, his saving grace, and his forgiveness are what make us worthy. Our worth does not come through our great accomplishments, nor does it come from other people’s acceptance (or rejection) of us. When we are so caught up in our own sense of inability and insecurity that we can never see God’s power or possibility then we can never experience the fullness of life. Those are all roads that lead to nowhere. Jesus tells us that our worth is in him and his love for us. And that is where transformation from death to new life begins. It does not come from earning love. It comes from trusting that you are loved.

In his book, *Abba’s Child*, Brennan Manning writes, “The heart converted from mistrust to trust in the irreversible forgiveness of Jesus Christ is nothing less than a new creation, and all ambiguity about personal identity is blown away. ... The promised peace that the world cannot give is located in being in right relationship with God.”ⁱ

Life-changing faith begins with trusting that Jesus is who he says he is and will do what he says he will do. Transformation begins with being loved not earning love. “In the process of transformation the Spirit of God moves us from behaviors motivated by fear and self-protection to trust and abandonment to God from the ego’s desperate attempts to control the outcomes of our lives to an ability to give ourselves over to the will of God which is often the foolishness of this world.”ⁱⁱ

Maybe we are hesitant to give over the keys because, if we are honest, we don’t trust that Jesus loves us, forgives us and is enough for us. Or maybe we are hesitant to give over the keys because we don’t want to give up control of our lives. We want new life but without the dying process and we cannot figure out why new life isn’t happening.

Author Dallas Willard explains it this way: If your neighbor is having trouble with his automobile, you might think he just got a lemon. And you might be right. But if you found that he was supplementing his gasoline with a quart of water now and then, you would not blame the car or its maker for it not running, or for running in fits and starts. You would say that the car was not built to work under the conditions imposed by the owner. And you would certainly advise him to put only the appropriate kind of fuel in the tank. After some restorative work, perhaps the car would then run fine. We must approach current disappointments about our walk with Christ in a similar way. It too is not meant to run on just anything you may give it. If it doesn't work at all, or only in fits and starts, that is because we do not give ourselves to it in a way that allows our lives to be taken over by it.ⁱⁱⁱ

The disciples knew Jesus was the Messiah, but it was not enough to know who he was, they had to commit themselves to him, give their allegiance to him, they had to allow their lives to be taken over by it. With verse 25, we understand clearly that Jesus does not ask us to lose ourselves. He rather invites us to discover our true self by following him. It is not by a lukewarm and lazy attitude, but only with all their heart and all their strength that the disciples can follow the path of the Master. Denying oneself is not a matter of giving up something, whether for Lent or for the whole of life: it is a decisive saying 'No' to oneself, to one's hopes and plans and ambitions, to one's likes and dislikes, to one's nearest and dearest for the sake of Christ. It is believing that trusting Jesus and our intentional obedience to Him is the only way out of the soul-crushing roundabout most of us find ourselves stuck in.

In her book, *Patrix*, Reverend Nadia Bolz-Weber wrote, "Jesus says, "Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me." He says, "The first shall be last and the last shall be first," and infuriating things like "if you seek to find your life you will lose it but those who lose their life will find it." And every single time I die to something - my notions of my own specialness, my plans and desires for something to be a very particular way - every single time I fight it and yet every single time I discover more life and more freedom than if I had gotten what I wanted."^{iv}

If you hand over the keys to God or if God takes them from you like a designated driver who loves you enough to ignore your protests, there is no promise that the road He takes off the roundabout will be easy. It may be grueling; it may be full of sharp turns and nauseating curves. There may be speed bumps and check points and depressing scenery for miles. But on that road you look to your left and see Who you are with and when you trust Jesus, you will say, "it is well." It is well with my soul because of the One who is with me through it all. This, this life is a hundred times better than being stuck on the roundabout.

This morning Jesus asks you, "Who do you say I am?" What is your heart response to him? Not the Sunday School answers nor the cliché answers but rather the answer that comes when your feet are held to the fire or your heart is shattered in pieces or your life is on the line or in the quiet when your ego says you aren't enough. Do you trust that Jesus died for you? Can you trust that God has forgiven you? Do you trust that Jesus loves you? That He likes you? That He is crazy about you?

And my question to you and to me this morning is this - "Do we want off the roundabout? Or Do we want to keep circling convinced that we can find meaningful life around the corner even when it hasn't been there the last 18 loops? Do we want our ego to continue to be the driving force in our life? I don't know about you but I've learned we are horrible masters - exhausting, neurotic and difficult to please. Do we desire and ache enough to be rescued from our self-centeredness, from our suffocating self-obsession? That will only happen when we deny ourselves, live beyond ourselves, and live outside of ourselves.

And here is the thing - we will have to do this daily. Over and over. Denying ourselves is not a one-time act but a daily choice to hand over the keys and let Jesus in the driver's seat.

My hope for us is that every time we grab our keys may we be prompted to ask - "who is driving my life right now? Me or Jesus?" And before we take another step, may we trust that Jesus will do a better job because he loves us and slide ourselves on over to the passenger seat.

In John 10:10, Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

That promise is to you and to me. So let's replace "they" with our name and say it together out loud. "Jesus came that I, _____, may have life and have it abundantly."

ⁱ Manning, Brennan. *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging*. NavPress, 2002.

ⁱⁱ Barton, Ruth Haley. *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*. IVP Books, 2008.

ⁱⁱⁱ Willard, Dallas. *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*. HarperOne, 2014.

^{iv} Bolz-Weber, Nadia. *Pastrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Saint and Sinner*. Jericho Books, 2014.