

BEYOND AND WITHIN

Text: Mark 8:34-37

LHUMC 10/6/13

Does Your Church Have a Prayer? series #4

- I. Introduction—Two images kept coming up in my mind this week as I read chapter five in the book
 - A. The first is that when it comes to the “beyond and within” in our lives and in the life of our church, there is this great balancing act between the two. (show picture of tight-rope walker).
 1. In our own lives, we have to balance between growing and maturing what is within us—you can call it our “spirit”, or like Paul, who talked about this balancing act all the time, you could simply call it “faith”, and then the “beyond”—which is the expanding of what we do with our faith—which Paul called “works”.
 2. In the church, there is this great balancing act between what we do here and what we do out there. Or even more specifically, how we care for each other and how we care for others.
 3. And so the image is that when either the beyond or the within gets too heavy, it’s easy to fall off the tightrope—to lose our balance as we walk that sometimes tricky way of service and servanthood.
 - B. The other image is the one of the chicken and the egg, where the question becomes “Which comes first, the beyond or the within?”
 1. And as the book makes clear, if we look at the times that Jesus gave specific directions to his first disciples as to what they were supposed to be about, the answer to that one may be clearer than the chicken or the egg question.
 - a) For what is clear from those passages that the book had us read was that when Jesus gave his disciples ultimatums about what they were going to have to do to fulfill his vision for them and for his kingdom, what he didn’t say was things like, “Let’s just hang out here while I tell you some cool parables.”
 - b) Or in the story that happens right after today’s scripture when Peter at the time of Jesus transfiguration on the mountaintop said “Let’s build a temple here for you, Jesus, and we’ll just stay here and worship you in your glory”. To which Jesus did not say, “Great idea, Peter!” (Just the opposite, actually)
 - c) And Jesus never said, “If you want to be my disciples, you must drop your nets and form a Bible study.”

2. No, as the book says, “Assessing the current reality of his ministry, Jesus extended invitations to discipleship that envisioned a life that was **beyond** their current understanding of reality.”
 - a) And so his calls to discipleship were full of words and phrases like “Go” and “forget about yourself” and “take up your cross” and “follow me.”
 - b) That last phrase is particularly enlightening when you take into account the fact that Jesus was one who never stood still very long. Jesus was always not just looking beyond, but moving beyond. So to follow him, we have little choice but to do the same.
 - c) As William Willimon has said, “Anyone who wants to be with Jesus must be willing to relocate.” (*Pulpit Resource*, April-June 2011, p. 58) Even if it’s just spiritually.
 - d) All of which would suggest that if Jesus is to be believed, the answer to the question “Which comes first, the beyond or the within?” in terms of our discipleship and our church, the answer is that which is beyond our hearts and the walls of our church is what comes first and is what should be driving our decisions.

II. And so based on what Jesus says, the authors then make the point that if we are to move forward to the Promised Land, we have to always be looking beyond where we’ve been, beyond where we are, beyond our own comfort and security and self-interests.

A. And yet at the same time, notice that the chapter’s title is “Beyond and Within” which suggests that the “within” is important for at least a couple of reasons:

1. First, as we’ve talked about a couple of weeks ago, sometimes we have to look “within” ourselves to see and understand those personal giants that we all have that keep us from looking beyond ourselves.
2. And then second, what we do here within these walls in the areas of worship and education and Bible studies and prayer is important-- we participate in those things in order to equip and empower ourselves so that we are ready and able and willing to move out beyond the walls.
 - a) The problem is when we get stuck within—when we give in to the temptation and the comfort of the “within”.
 - b) And the main symptom of that is when we simply continue to do things like we always have because it’s easier and less

threatening to simply ignore the fact that the world out beyond is constantly changing, and the world needs what the church has to offer more than ever these days.

B. So what does this look like? What does it look like when a church overcomes the temptation to stay in the comfortable confines of the “within” to look “beyond” ? Here is a true story from the Leader’s Guide that I could relate to in my experiences in various churches: A church needed a new facility because it was located in a fast-growing suburban community. The church found itself in a constant struggle to find space for worship and its new and expanding programs. Finally, a capital campaign was completed, a new site was secured, and construction began. Because of the many worshipers on Sunday morning, an expansive parking lot was needed. It was beautiful and inviting, but its appeal was not limited to Sunday morning worshipers. It was also ideal for the many skateboarders in the adjacent neighborhoods. “What! Skateboarders on the new pavement! What are we to do?” cried the trustees. Would they put up no trespassing signs to dissuade the neighborhood youth? Would it be necessary to patrol the area during after-school hours? What were they going to do to protect their newly paved parking lots? Enter a creative, retired, and lifelong athlete. He would talk with the youth and see what could be done. The conversations with the youth, and later with the trustees, resulted in a surprising turn of events. Rather than prohibiting the skateboarders from using the parking lot, the church embraced their presence and formed a weekly Bible study for them. Later, this ministry became a draw for other youth as it expanded to include monthly outings to “primo” skateboarding sites around the state. A youth ministry was born. The church had a choice. They could focus inwardly, on themselves, and the protection of the beautiful and inviting new facility, or they could choose to use the beautiful and exciting new facility to nurture the faith of their neighbors...” (*Does Your Church Have a Prayer?* Leader’s Guide, pp. 123-124).

C. I smiled at that story because of all the times I’ve seen churches experience that choice of “beyond or within” as they live out similar stories.

1. New addition to Xenia church—In preparation for the building campaign, they canvassed the neighborhood and community agencies to see what they would want in an addition to the church. So that new

facility became not just a church building, but a community center in every sense of the word. And the community used the building way more than the church did.

2. Basketball hoop in Constantine was put up for our kids. The unintended consequence was that the hoop immediately became a magnet for every kid in town. We would hear the basketball bouncing at all hours of the day and night. To make a long story short, our own kids were the best “backdoor”, “backcourt” evangelists that church ever had, simply in the hours they spent out at that hoop with all of those other kids. And over time, we began to involve some of those kids in other ways in the life of the church.

III. Conclusion

- A. Those stories point out the reality for our church and any church which is that our life together is a series of choices, and when you boil them down, just about all of them are ones in which what we are really asking ourselves and each other is the question “Which comes first, the beyond or the within?”
 - 1. For Jesus, the answer was clear, and was reflected in all of his various calls and definitions of true discipleship.
 - 2. For they are calls to “forget about ourselves”, calls to “go”, calls to “witness, even to the ends of the earth”, calls to look beyond our current reality to a new vision and an outward focus
- B. Thanks be to God for this vision that Jesus has for us, thanks be to God for all the opportunities we get and will continue to get each and every day in God’s great beyond to live it out.