

***Grace, Mercy, & Peace from God our Father & our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen***

Do you realize that the northern fork of the Oregon Trail ends about 2 miles from here? An old stone pyramid marks the spot on Military Road near Clover Creek Elementary School. Up until about 150 years ago people arrived right in our neighborhood with just about nothing except their oxen, their wagons and the few crucial items that survived the arduous 2000 mile journey from Missouri.

All along the Oregon Trail cherished personal items littered the way as pioneers were forced to leave behind to lighten their loads. Fort Laramie, Wyoming was known as “Camp Sacrifice” because travelers dumped so many precious items when facing the looming mountain crossing. During the 1849 gold rush travelers abandoned 20,000 pounds of bacon outside the fort walls; that’s a lot of bacon.

One wonders what exactly possessed pioneers to continue moving westward as day after day they rode past discarded supplies, personal items, family heirlooms, dead livestock, and graves. They did all of this based on nothing more than trust in the promise of a new life that awaited them at the end of the journey.

Jesus and the disciple possess a similar spirit this morning. Jesus boldly launches into His ministry fully aware that John – who baptized Him only verses before – has been arrested for proclaiming the same message of repentance and the same kingdom of God.

Andrew, Peter, James and John walk away from – leave behind without looking back – established trades, certain futures, wealth,

even family to follow Jesus and “fish for people” – whatever that means – with nothing more than trust in Jesus’ promise of a new and better life.

We view Mark’s portrayal of Jesus calling of Andrew, Peter, James, and John as a historical certainty, but when you look at it objectively, it’s preposterous, isn’t it? *It makes no logical sense at all to leave everything behind just because some guy – no matter how charismatic or special He may have been – asks you to do it.*

I mean, come on, if someone tells you to take all your retirement savings and put it into a particular penny stock, the crazy bell starts to ring in your head. Just like. when I heard that my former church custodian, Charlie, in Ferguson, Missouri had walked away from his life and career as an aeronautical engineer at MacDonald Douglas Aerospace, and sunk all his resources into the venture of prospecting for Gold in Oregon, I knew he was an idiot.

And yet, I recall being catapulted forward into an entirely new trajectory to follow and serve the gospel of Jesus Christ, leaving behind the hopes and dreams forged over a lifetime, based on a trust that the only path that could redeem my life, indeed the life of this wounded world, meant following Jesus – literally getting behind Jesus. Following Jesus – in the way I felt called – meant abandoning the life I had mapped out for myself, foregoing my ideal vision of myself and what I could accomplish, and leading a life that went against the strong currents of the world. Yet, I did all this as I recall without the slightest hesitation or desire to look back at what I left

behind. Looking back now, I can see that it was a time of profound recklessness. No one promised me any certainty, only the hope that Jesus had forged *the path to life*. The only certainty in that moment: *following any other trail this world offered led to isolation, human misery, death and decay.*

You may be tempted to call me an idiot; many people have by the way. But in some way, everyone in this room has in some way, done precisely the same thing. That being established, *let me assure you that Charlie was not part of an expedition of hundreds seeking their fortune in Oregon gold*, which did not end well by the way. That leads us to draw one of two apparent conclusions. First, confirmation of Woody Allens old adage: *I would never join a club that would have me as a member*. Or second, *we are all passengers on a ship of fools*.

Because honestly, *if you ask the average person on the street what they think of a person who reaches out to help people who will never be able to return the favor*; if you ask that same person on the street what they think of a person who gives their money away without any hope or expectation of seeing a return on that money – some as much as 10% of their income or more; *if you ask that very same person on the street what they think of a person who invites dirty homeless people to share a meal with them*; I dare say, if you ask most people what they think of other people who gather every week to listen to the Words of a man who by all accounts never managed to accumulate any wealth or property, who advised people to give away all their money

– to sell all that they had and give it to the poor, who is said to have turned water into wine, walked on water, healed lepers, the blind, the disabled, even raised the dead BUT all 2000 years ago; finally, if you ask most people what they think people who readily admit that they consistently follow the wrong path in life and feel the need to be forgiveness for it – *I dare say, you might be tempted to doubt that person's sanity or intelligence, perhaps both.*

*A third but rarely used conclusion is at our disposal; namely, we can invoke the Holy Spirit defense. We can conclude that the Holy Spirit is at work in us, and compelling us to follow this Jesus for the sake of the world.* Precisely as She did with the disciples, the prophets, the King David, Abraham, Moses, Joseph, Mary Magdalen, Mary the mother of Jesus, Joshua, Ruth... ; I could go on.

Andrew, Peter, James and John make a preposterous choice that day by the lake, and yet, they will be there when:

- Jesus teaches in the synagogue with authority (1:22)
- rebukes and casts out an unclean spirit with a word (1:25)
- heals Simon's mother-in-law (1:31)
- Walks on the water;
- cures many sick and casts out many demons (1:34)
- he heals a leper (1:41)
- he forgives and heals a paralytic (2:5, 11)
- feed 5000 and 4000

It is also true that they will be there when Jesus is judged, condemned, mocked, whipped, crucified and dies; hardly an example to follow.

Then again, they will be with Jesus when He is raised from the dead and appear numerous time. They will be with Jesus when He ascends to the Father. And Jesus will be with them when they share the good news with the world; Jesus will be with them when they care for the poor, Jesus will be with them when are crucified, beheaded, dragged by horses, beaten, imprisoned; Jesus will be with them at the moment of their deaths to take them to the Father.

And *I dare say, the world may doubt our sanity and our intelligence, perhaps both, but* Jesus will be us also.

*Amen !!!*