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NOT LIKE PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN
Matthew 4

In her book, *New: Understanding Our Need For Novelty and Change*, science writer Winifred Gallagher defines boredom as “the unpleasant sense that there is nothing that interests you.” Can you think of times in your life when you have been bored? As a kid I loved summer when we didn’t have to go to school. But I do remember those dog days when a number of the kids that lived on our street were away on summer vacation trips. It was hot. We’d gone swimming every day for weeks. There weren’t enough of us around to make teams for a baseball game or any other game. We’d done a lot of the things we typically did for fun, and now we were sitting around with nothing to do. We had that, “What do you want to do? I don’t know, what do you want to do?” conversation. We were a little bored. Nothing seemed very interesting. I don’t recall ever being so bored that I wanted school to start again, but we did get a little bored.

There is a worse boredom than that. I once had a startling conversation with a friend. He was a solid Christian brother, very successful in his career, financially doing well, he was married and had a child and the family was good, but in the conversation he admitted to me that he didn’t find anything compelling in life. Nothing was really interesting to him. He didn’t use the word “bored,” but his condition was exactly the way Gallagher defined boredom. He kept on with life, doing what he knew he was supposed to do, but it was mostly tedium for him. He was bored. He was going through the motions, but he never really got excited about anything. The thought of living like that makes me shudder even today.

Boredom tends to be something that mostly exists in our culture. Anthropologist Henry Harpending has studied various cultures and has discovered that a number of them have no word for “boredom.” Even in English there is no derivation for the word “boredom.” It doesn’t come from any other language, but was specially created as an English word. But it didn’t appear until the latter half of the 18th century, suggesting that the idea of boredom is relatively recent.

Most of us, maybe all of us, have two competing desires that battle each other within us. One desire is to be safe and comfortable. It is the desire to mostly avoid pain and to just be able to enjoy ourselves, to live with plenty of pleasure and to be able to relax.

The other desire is to live a life full of adventure. It is a desire to make a difference in this world and to not merely exist, but to live with passion, meaning and significance. This life involves taking some risks, can be a little dangerous, coming with the very real possibility of injury and pain and loss, but it is full of passion and is never dull.

I think that the greatest job in the world has got to be backup qb in the NFL. The average salary of a backup is \$1.6 million per year. And they just stand on the sidelines. No threat of injury or failure. It's safe, fun and very lucrative. But the interesting thing about that is every backup qb in that league wants to be a starter. Being the backup is safe, but the thrill, the adventure is in playing the game where there is real risk, yes, of injury, and certainly of failure and loss. But that's really what it's all about. That's where the thrill is.

For most of us that drive to be safe and comfortable is stronger than the drive for adventure and passion. The result of this is that the many of us find ourselves living comfortable lives that are nearly totally lacking in adventure. Unfortunately, that desire for adventure and meaning never really goes away, so it nags at us. That nagging is exacerbated by the fact that opting for the safe, comfortable life usually leaves us with a certain boredom. Gradually things just seem less interesting, less compelling. We lose passion. We begin to find there is no point to just being safe and comfortable, there is no meaning in it.

Our culture's response to that is to try to substitute amusement for adventure. We flock to movies, television shows, concerts, and sporting events and try to conjure up some excitement and even some sort of meaning out of them. We might read thriller or romance novels, but in the end, while these things are temporarily entertaining, they leave us right where we were, lacking adventure and meaning.

Do you ever find yourself feeling like it all ought to be more exciting than it is? Or that there ought to be some point to this? Do you ever find yourself longing for adventure, but not even sure of what that would mean? Do you ever feel like you are doing the things you're supposed to do, but you get little joy out of it and have precious little passion in the process? Do you ever wonder if maybe there ought to be more to life than this?

Jesus has something to say about all of this. And today we are going to get a glimpse of a different way of living that he offers us. He is going to invite us to go on an adventure with him, one that is loaded with significance, is maybe a bit risky, but is never dull. Let's look at Matthew 4.

JESUS PASSED A TEST

After Jesus was baptized the first thing he did was to go out into the desert all by himself. Matthew tells us he was led by the Spirit to go out to that desolate region where he did not eat for almost 6 weeks. He took the best shots his enemy could give him as a way of preparing for the ordeal ahead.

The training of Navy Seals is notoriously demanding. One awful aspect of it is Hell Week. This is a period of 5 and a half days of soul crushing tests of endurance. The trainees only sleep about 4 hours total in those days. They do 20 hours of physical training per day. They will run over 200 miles during the week. They continually make them lie down in the cold surf so they get soaked and covered in wet sand. They are cold, wet and sandy the entire time. Admiral William McRaven in his speech about Seal training describes their group being taken to mud flats and made to spend the entire night standing in the frigid mud up to their necks. The point is to weed out those who can't endure, but also to prepare them for grueling missions and teach them they can endure far more than they ever imagined. Jesus went through something akin to that in that desert.

I taught on this very passage not long ago. Satan showed up when Jesus was in a weakened state after weeks with no food and no company. At the heart of all the temptations was this: Satan was trying to get Jesus to get something for himself by taking a short cut, by disobeying what he knew his Father wanted him to do.

He was hungry, so Satan suggested he ought to miraculously command bread to appear. There was nothing wrong with using his power to make bread because he would later do that very thing in his ministry. And there certainly was nothing wrong with eating. Without food he would die. The need for food is normal, a God-given need. But Jesus knew the Father wanted him to fast until the Father provided him with food. He refused to disobey the Father by choosing to get what he felt he needed by whatever means necessary. He said no to the very real temptation to call on his divine power to satisfy a reasonable need for food. Instead he chose to keep doing what he had been doing, which was to wait on the Father to tell him the fast was over and provide him with food.

Satan next played on Jesus' need to know he could trust the Father. He told him to jump off a pinnacle of the temple and watch the Father protect him. In other words, have the Father prove he's really going to take care of you. "Hey, Jesus, you've got some big challenges ahead. You need to know you can count on the Father when it gets really gnarly. Why don't you give him a test run so you know he'll be there when you need him?" That's reasonable, isn't it? If you were a professional golfer

and a golf club company gave you their latest and best club, would you take it out for the first time in a tournament? No, you'd want to make sure of it, right? So you'd take it out to the driving range and test it out to find out if you could count on it to do what you needed it to do. Satan suggested Jesus give the Father a test run just to make sure everything would work. But Jesus refused to "test" the Father that way. Instead, Jesus insisted on acting in faith, trusting God, not demanding proof.

Finally Satan offered what rightfully belonged to Jesus, all the kingdoms of the world. All he needed to do was bow down to Satan and he could have them, free of charge. Those kingdoms belonged to Jesus. He deserved them. But Jesus absolutely refused to take that shortcut, for he would only worship his Father.

Most of what Satan offered Jesus was not inherently bad. It was about legitimate needs and desires. It was not wrong for Jesus to need bread, to have confidence that God would provide for him, or to rule all the nations. This is a reminder that we will face temptations that may involve totally legitimate needs and desires. The question is, will we trust God to provide for us as we live in obedience to him, or will we insist on getting what we think we need or desire no matter what it takes? Jesus passed those tests with flying colors.

JESUS BEGAN TO PREACH

So Jesus began to travel around preaching. His message initially was in line with that of John the Baptizer. He was telling people to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

A kingdom is a place where a king rules, where people are subject to him and live by his decrees. It is the place where what the king says is law. There aren't many kingdoms anymore. England has monarchs, but they don't actually rule anything. They are symbolic. Laurie has actually been to a kingdom. 15 years ago she went with Toby on a mission trip to Fiji and Tonga. Tonga is a kingdom. The king's name is Aho'eitu Unuaki'otonga Tuku'aho, also known as Tupou VI. He is the younger brother of the king who ruled when Laurie and Toby visited there. That king died in 2012 and Tupou VI took over. Do you care what Tupou VI says? His word doesn't mean anything here. We are not part of his kingdom, so his decrees have zero effect here and he has absolutely no authority here. We pay no attention whatsoever to what he orders because we're not in his kingdom.

Jesus said the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God, the place where God's word is law and he has total rule, had come near to the Jewish people of his day. It

was near in the sense that Jesus was with them, and in him the kingdom of God existed perfectly, for the Father, the king of heaven, ruled totally. He did exactly what the Father said, as he had just demonstrated in both his baptism and the time of temptation in the wilderness. But he was also bringing to the people the kingdom of heaven in the sense that he was already in the process of creating a place on earth where what God decrees rules.

In my kingdom, what I think, what I want, what I feel I need, rules. Typically that means I do whatever I feel I must to make me happy. That's how life is in the kingdom of Me. To repent is to change your mind. Jesus was calling on people to change their minds by transferring from the kingdom of Me, to the kingdom of God. In the kingdom of God what the Almighty God, the Holy God, the God of grace, says rules...in everything. It's not about me getting what I want, about me being happy, about me deciding what is right and wrong or what matters most. It is about doing what God says, about pleasing him, about him deciding right and wrong and what is important and what isn't.

The Kingdom of God is a place of peace, love, joy and hope. It is a place where there is harmony and unity, where we can experience life as it was intended, true fulfilling eternal life. The Kingdom of Me is a place where we experience frustration, anger, division, disappointment, restlessness, and futility.

JESUS ISSUED A CHALLENGE

In verses 18-19 as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee one day he encountered two brothers, Simon and Andrew, who had a thriving fishing business. They were at work, standing in shallow water, tossing one-man nets out into the deeper water and pulling them back in, hopefully with fish inside. He challenged them to come with him, to follow him and change their careers from catching fish to catching people. Verse 20 says "At once they left their nets and followed him."

Jesus went a bit farther down the beach where he came upon another fishing company, Zebedee and Sons. They were working on the much larger nets they would use from a boat, preparing for an evening of fishing. Again Jesus challenged the two sons, James and John, to come and follow him. Verse 22 says they immediately left both their boat and their dad and followed him.

Isn't it surprising that these men, who had grown up as fishermen, left everything and started following Jesus just because he suggested they should do so? Matthew expects us to understand that this was not the first exposure these 4 men had to Jesus. He has been preaching in this area for some time. We know from John's

account of Jesus' life that all of them had already spent considerable personal time with Jesus. Some of them had witnessed him turning water into wine and had seen him healing many people. They were already listening to him, believing in him, but now Jesus was asking them to make a commitment, and they responded.

Remember what Jesus' challenge to them entailed, for he also challenges us to come and follow him. It means some sacrifice. Simon, Andrew and the Zebedee brothers had to leave their fishing businesses to follow Jesus. You might say it's not that big of a deal because it wasn't like they were leaving lucrative positions at Apple Computers or Google and foregoing their stock options and equity in the companies. But they knew fishing and were making a living doing it. They were trading that in for following an itinerant teacher who had no visible means of support. We don't know about the others, but we do know that Simon at least was married. Can you imagine that conversation his wife might have had with him? "So, Simon, I like this Jesus guy too, but exactly what are we going to live on? Where's the money going to come from? Is he going to pay you guys a salary? No? Well, what's the plan then? You know, Simon, the Bible has some things to say to men who don't support their families." James and John had to bail out on dad and the family business. They had to give up a lot.

Following him meant a complete re-orientation of their lives. This was a radical career change, but it was more than that. I don't like the NIV translation of verse 19 where they have Jesus saying, "I will send you out to fish for people." It is common for preachers to expound at this point on ways we must fish for people and give tips on how we can do that. I suppose that is useful at times, but it's not really the point here. What Jesus said literally was "I will make you fishers of people." He didn't say "I will send you to fish for people." He didn't say, "I will teach you how to fish for people." He didn't say, "you guys need to make yourselves into fishers of people and you need to go out and catch some." What he said was, "I will make you fishers of people." He would do this. This was something he would do in their lives. He would bring it about. It would be a total change in what their lives were about. He would change them so that from then on they would be about people, not about money or success or even merely survival. This was going to be a new direction, a new way of seeing the world, a new way of living.

To follow him meant they had to go where Jesus led them. They didn't have the option of saying when Jesus headed for Jerusalem despite people plotting to kill him there, "I think I'm going to sit this one out, Boss. I'll catch up with you when you get back to Galilee."

Following him meant more than just physically going along with him. It meant accepting and submitting to his teaching. It meant believing in what he said and putting it into practice in their lives. To do that put them at odds with their culture. Much of what Jesus said was opposed to the most respected leaders of that day, and to live by it guaranteed they would incur their hostility.

But following Jesus also meant they were embarking on the most exciting, astounding adventure they could ever have imagined. It meant their lives took on significance beyond anything they had ever dreamed of. They would go through things no one had ever experienced, see things no one had ever seen. It was never boring!

IMPLICATIONS

Jesus offers a similar challenge to us. It's not exactly the same. We are not going to be the founding apostles upon whom Jesus would build his church. But he is still saying to people today, to us, "Come and follow me." It still involves sacrifice. It still results in a total change of life. It still involves submission to his instruction and it still requires that we follow him wherever he chooses to lead us.

FOLLOWING JESUS MEANS ACCEPTING CHANGE

Consider those 4 men in this passage, Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John. They were ordinary guys, probably pretty good at their job as commercial fishermen. No one would ever have imagined what they would become. Today, two millennia later, people all over the world still name their sons after those guys. I feel quite confident that no one is going to be naming children after me even 50 years from now. I feel safe in that prediction since no one is naming children after me right now!

Jesus took those men in directions they could never have imagined. To go in those directions they had to let go of what had previously been what their life was all about. But Jesus gave them something totally new and infinitely more significant for their lives to be about. For us, following Jesus will also mean change. Our lives will be about something new, something different than they were before Jesus came along. Like those first disciples a lot of that change will have to do with the fact that we will now be about people. We are about bringing them the grace of God, both through our words and through the way we treat them.

That is obviously still a need today. Laurie has a voice student that demonstrated this. Leading up to Christmas Laurie wanted her to work on the familiar Christmas

carol *Away In A Manger*. When Laurie first showed the music to her she said, “What does “away in a manger” mean? Laurie said, “No, it’s manger, not manager.” The girl said, “What’s a manger?” She’d never heard of a manger and didn’t know anything about the baby born in a manger. I wonder where she has been at Christmas her entire life. But the point is there clearly are many people around us who need to have people fishing for them.

There is one fundamental aspect of this change. If we follow Jesus we are going to have to do what he says to do. Jesus is going to have to be the one who decides what sort of choices we make and how we live. We have a neighbor who claims to be a believer in Jesus. He’s a follower of Jesus. But he doesn’t treat other people the way Jesus said we should. He doesn’t love God and worship him with other people the way Jesus said we should. He doesn’t use his money the way Jesus said we should. His ideas about life are generally not formed by what Jesus says. Pretty consistently he presents a conundrum. He somehow thinks he’s following Jesus without going anywhere that Jesus leads him. If we’re going to follow Jesus, then we’ll actually have to follow him and do what he says.

In Matthew 7:21 Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Not everyone who says he or she is a follower of Jesus is actually following Jesus.

One clear command of Jesus is if we follow him we will follow him into the kingdom of God. That means that we have quit living in the Kingdom of Me to live in the Kingdom of Christ. To follow Jesus is to say, “My life is no longer about promoting and protecting me. It is now about doing whatever Jesus tells me to do.” Now life is about having God’s orders rule everything in my life. It is about making my life the kingdom of God on earth, for in this life, God rules in everything.

Following Jesus means whatever God says is important, that is what I emphasize and do, not what I might think is important. Following Jesus means what God says is right to do and what is wrong, that is what I believe. Following Jesus means when Jesus tells me to jump I don’t ask, “Why should I or what’s the purpose of this?” I don’t say, “I’m sorry, I’m just not feeling that today.” I simply say, “How high?” then jump.

FOLLOWING JESUS BRINGS ENCOURAGEMENT

Here's the cool thing about following Jesus. If you follow him, wherever you go he's going to get there before you. We recently went out to a restaurant Laurie and I were not familiar with. We went there at Carissa's suggestion. We didn't know the place or how to get there. But we followed her suggestion and we followed her as she drove there. It took all the stress out of finding the place. Just go where she took us. No stress, just follow.

That's the way we can be as we follow Jesus. Just go where he takes us. Jesus took those original followers into some seemingly impossible situations, like a life-threatening storm at sea or the need to feed a crowd of thousands of people. In those humanly impossible circumstances Jesus being there was all they needed. That's what the disciples had to learn.

The great thing about following Jesus is wherever he takes you, he will always be there ahead of you. That means you don't have to worry about controlling everything, making it turn out the way you want. Just go where he takes you and do what he tells you to do. No stress! In John 14:18 Jesus was telling his disciples that he was going to leave them. This idea was terribly disturbing for them. They'd left everything to follow him, and now he was leaving? What were they supposed to do? But in verse 18 he said, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." Jesus later promised he would be with us to the end of this world. Those guys had seen Jesus stop a storm in its tracks just by telling it to chill out. They were about to see him conquer death. I'm pretty sure the fact that he would be with them gave them a powerful sense of peace. It can and should do the same for us.

I have mentioned before we had a few unsettling moments back in September when our flight to Maui aborted the approach seconds before landing, and it quickly became apparent that something was wrong with our plane. There were some tense moments, but they did manage to safely land the plane in Honolulu, and we found ourselves in the Honolulu airport at 10 PM wondering what they were going to do with us. I started chafing, telling Laurie there was no way they would be able to scrounge up another airplane and a crew to get us to Maui at that time of night. I was tired and annoyed. At one point on the way back from the Men's Room I had a conversation with the Lord. I told him, "Okay, I don't like this. But I know you're here with us, so wherever you want to take us and do with us is all right. Help me respond well." My attitude changed and became more positive. On the way back to where we were sitting I went to the windows of the room we were in and looked out at our airplane. It was dark, but I could see someone moving around with a flashlight in the cockpit. Now in a better state of mind I went back and told Laurie I thought someone was working on the plane.

Sure enough, a few minutes later the pilot came out and told us they only had to swap out one part, that they would have it fixed soon and they would fly us to our destination. Seemed like the Lord just wanted to remind me to remember that he was with us and be at peace with that. When I did, we were soon on our way.

FOLLOWING JESUS IS AN ADVENTURE

I look forward to the day a few years down the road when Laurie and I can tag along when our grandchildren go to Disneyland. That's going to be great fun. Honestly, these days, though I still love Disneyland, there are a number of rides that I'm not all that interested in going on. A classic example is Pirates of the Caribbean. Someday it will be fun to see my grandchildren be excited about that, but for me it's kind of, please excuse the term, boring. There's no adventure in it. There are a few drops, but they're not big enough to give a thrill. And there are no surprises on the ride. I know what's coming next and have seen it before. Here's the bay where the fort and the pirate ships are firing cannon at each other. Here's the town where the pirates are looting. There's the jail cell where the jailed pirates are trying to lure the dog who has the key ring in his mouth. Yo ho, yo ho, a pirate's life for me at this point in my life has become ho hum, ho hum been there, done that.

Do you think the disciples thought of those years following Jesus as ho hum, been there, done that? They learned, saw and experienced things they had never even dreamed of. Life was sometimes challenging, at times scary, sometimes confusing, sometimes thrilling, but never boring. They would go through tense confrontations with the leaders of their nation, witness astounding things done by Jesus, watch him calm a storm on the lake and walk on water, be there when Jesus produced food basically out of nowhere and many more events. It was a thrill ride.

Our lives following Jesus won't have the amazing events that those men went through. But it will be an adventure. We don't know where he will take us, or what he might do. To this day I at times reflect on the fact that I have been a pastor for 38 years. I never expected to be a pastor. I never wanted to be a pastor. I didn't think I was cut out for that role, and didn't really even like the idea of it. But Jesus had different ideas. And I can assure you that it has never been boring. Jesus will take you on a different journey, but as you go with him I assure you it won't be dull. Jesus is going to lead you to live an extraordinary life, one that shows people how Jesus would act and live in every situation they encounter.

Following Jesus is an adventure because each day he has something for you to do. Every single thing you do you can bring glory to him so it all has meaning. And if

you trust him he will use you as a source of grace and blessing to other people. Later this month I am going to have to do jury duty again. I'm kind of annoyed because I just did jury duty last summer, but that was the County court and this is the Federal court, and they don't seem to care that they are disrupting my life quite a bit by both requiring me to do this. Now jury duty could be seen as important, except that for me it has always meant spending time sitting around doing nothing for no real discernible purpose because lawyers are often not crazy about pastors on their juries. So it seems a waste of my time. But even in that there will be meaning. I'm going there because that's where Jesus is taking me, and doing it faithfully with a good attitude honors him. And who knows what will happen as I follow him there.

Dan Meyer, an author and pastor back in Illinois has said this, "Imagine Jesus leading you on a wild, unpredictable, magnificent, transforming journey with him. Imagine gaining such closeness to him along the journey that he progressively infuses you with his character so that when people meet you they think, *"I'm meeting Jesus!"*" Imagine him filling you up from the very center of your being, from beyond yourself with a love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control that resulted in the fact that no addiction or seduction could ever own you again. Imagine you had such power from him in your center that no enemy could ever faze you again, that no storm or strife could ever destroy you again. If he called you to go off with him onto that great adventure, what would you say?"

I'm pretty sure you'd say, "Where do I sign up?" So let's sign up. View each day as a day you will follow Jesus, wherever he takes you. View it as a day he goes before you, knowing anything can happen, and whatever happens it will be full of meaning.