

“Moving On”  
Genesis 12:1-9; Acts 11:1-18;  
Mark 9:33-37; Mark 10:46-52

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Pastor Norman Fowler  
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

It is Father’s Day, so Happy Father’s Day. It is a wonderful time to think about the Lord, our God, as the Good Father example. And thinking about that, what God wants, what a good father wants for his children is for them to find a way through life, and maybe even helping them find that way.

It’s appropriate since that’s the series I want to talk about this summer—being on the Way. Last week we talked about Jesus being The Way, guiding us, opening the way for us, being the way for us and what that might mean.

So as we think about what God might want as a good father, a way for us, that word way in Greek doesn’t mean we just happen to see a good way and now we’re going to take a picture of it and move on. The idea of “way” really means there’s something we’re going to do. There’s a direction. There’s a sense of movement to it.

So did anyone figure out how all these different scripture passages might fit together? I think there might be multiple options here, but the one I’m going to use is the idea of moving on, of moving. It’s most obvious with Abram, who is later going to be called Abraham, who is called by God to pick his things up and move along. He’s actually moving from one physical place to another. I was listening to that and I was thinking, “Wow, at 75 do I want to be moving on?” But that’s part of it. It’s interesting to hear God and wonder how God moves us.

Now that’s a physical moving, but there might be some metaphorical moving as well. As you might guess when I bring up the idea of metaphorical, if we look at the other passages, we begin to see some moving on there that’s more of a metaphorical nature. Although with blind Bartimaeus, it’s not completely metaphorical. Blind Bartimaeus has a deficit and he wants to move on from that deficit, so he calls out to Jesus. There’s that healing of his deficit, his blindness, his inability to see. So he’s moving on.

We could take the Acts passage into a metaphorical space and say as Peter is praying, he’s got a certain blindness himself—a blindness to the possibility that God loves the Gentiles. And he’s moved on from that position. He’s moved on from a particular mindset about how he’s supposed to be, what he’s supposed to think. He brings it back to the other disciples and they are also amazed. Even the Gentiles have received the repentance that leads to life. You can hear the hesitation there—even the Gentiles. They begin to find out that God’s children are all people. They are getting moved on from where they have been to somewhere new.

The disciples—as they were walking with Jesus and talking amongst themselves about who is greatest, Jesus wants to move them on from the way they were thinking. They were probably thinking about who had the most power, who had the most status,

who had the most prestige, who was the closest to Jesus. He flips that on them and says, “The greatest among you is the one who is servant of all; not first, but last.” Then he brings that child in and says, “It’s when you pay attention to the most vulnerable among you, not when you worry about who has the most power, or status, or prestige, but who is the most vulnerable among you. As you receive them, you receive me.”

Each of these stories, in a way, is about being moved, moving on from one place to another. We know that that encounter with Jesus, getting moved on, is kind of literal for the disciples. We could have gone back and read about how he came along the sea and asked them to follow him. There’s that sense of movement as well—the idea that once you’ve encountered Jesus you follow and move along with him, move on. We also hear it with the Blind Bartimaeus story. After he’s been healed, he follows Jesus on the way. There’s this continual movement. What it makes me think about is the movement of faith, how faith invites us to move along, move on, be changed, be transformed.

It’s at this point in the sermon I think about how many sermons I have heard on this kind of thing where I’ve always felt like I’m no good; I have to change. It’s like nothing has happened before in my life and at this moment because of this sermon now we have to be transformed. I don’t think that’s true. I think that we recognize that we have some hesitation around change. We struggle with it. I think that oftentimes we are taught that we should set a goal, and reach the goal, and then we’ve arrived. We define success as something that we are always striving for and at some point we hope to get there. And then what? Will life be over?

In some ways, I’m being facetious here, but we have such a focus on ends that it seems we forget about the means. We forget about the journey. Perhaps there’s not really that much distinction between the ends and the means. The ends and the means are what we’re doing. There’s an invitation to a journey. It’s an ongoing transformation. It is an invitation to recognize how sometimes we want to try to make our lives as simple and as static as possible, but I think if you look at the world we live in there’s no way we can completely make our lives static. If nothing else, our bodies keep changing. They continually get older. Some of us know that.

The world keeps moving. We weren’t given a creation that’s static. It moves. We move. In fact, if you’ve been laid up, you know how you want to get moving again. I think there’s a central tenant to the way the world is created—that we move; it is dynamic. Sometimes I think we get tired and feel like we need a break, but even that is a kind of movement. Rest, contemplation is its own kind of movement.

The second thing I would say is that as we think about this idea of moving on, it’s not like we haven’t done any of that. I think sometimes we need to look back and think about where we’ve moved from. As we’ve come to faith, faith has been changing us.

I was thinking about that. I was wondering if I hadn’t had faith in my life, what would my life be like without it? We often do not judge ourselves on how much we’ve changed. We judge ourselves on how much we haven’t reached perfection. But think

about how much we've changed. At least it feels that way to me. I can think of a number of ways I might have gone had I not had faith in my life—ways that wouldn't necessarily have been good ways, or at least, not good for others at times. It feels to me like we need to think about how much faith has already changed us. I don't think it's just an individual thing. I think that faith has changed us all.

Sometimes we think about how much one person matters. The perfect example to me has always been "It's a Wonderful Life." It's a Christmas movie, but it's one of those that actually looks at what would happen if somebody hadn't lived. So we see how the main character there, a wonderful guy, by helping take care of his community has changed the nature of it and made it Bedford Falls instead of Pottersville. When he is taken out of the picture, the town becomes Pottersville, a place of iniquity and greed and hardship. Bedford Falls is a place of love and grace. How much difference one person makes.

I think that's what happened with history. What difference one person – Jesus – makes, and he has made a difference to all of history. I don't think we could even have written the Declaration of Independence the way we did had it not been for Jesus. I think saying that all have inalienable rights including life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness couldn't be said unless there was that Way that we were comparing things to. That is the Way Jesus shows us, that all are created equal. I think that idea comes out of the New Testament. It is a Way in which our world keeps seeing its own reflection and changing. I think our society has changed, our culture has changed, the world has changed because Jesus brought the Way. That doesn't mean we're perfect, but I think we could have been a lot different.

If you think back in history, there were times, like back in Scotland, where the violence they did as punishment was incredible. I think we've changed. We may take some steps back at times. We may not be perfect. The world is struggling. It's still got its issues, but we have the Way to reflect on and to see ourselves in relationship to.

So, we get to keep working. I don't think God suggests that at some point in life we're going to find that we've arrived. Life is a work in progress. Our faith is a work in progress. It's a journey along the Way and we are invited to walk that Way. Not walk like an Egyptian, but to walk with Jesus and to find that when we do that, there is a joy as we embrace the journey. There is a joy in the way God takes us.

God taking Abraham on a journey was good. God continues to come to us and invite us in a Way that is good to go—out of slavery, out of sin, and into the goodness that God has for us. As we embrace that Way, I believe we embrace joy. We embrace love and sharing. We recognize the most vulnerable among us. There's something about that that brings life. In a way, our closed-mindedness can shut us down or get us stuck in a particular place whether it's metaphorical or not. But as we look to Jesus and as God enters in and leads us, we are invited to simply embrace that Way and find the joy. Amen.