

“Uh Jesus? You can’t do that” a sermon on Psalm 139:1-6 and Mark 3:1-6

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This last week I was at Annual Conference, doing what you do, which is visiting with lots of people, catching up and swapping stories. As an introvert,

it’s

exhausting

to be around people that intensely for three days. I’ll admit, I ate a meal in my room for a break. But all this peopling is worth it, because the people at Annual Conference have been with me for some very major times of change in my life. They are my church. Technically, as an Elder (ordained Elder, that’s my official job title), as an Elder, my church membership is with the Annual Conference. Conference is also my church in the ways that matter.

One of the people I caught up with was Katie Schneider Bryan, the first female pastor I knew. It was her farewell service at Centennial United Methodist Church where I first identified my call to ministry. At conference I visited with two women whose kids were in Sunday school with me 25 years ago. Turns out I grew up to be a pastor and one of them is in a rock and roll band, like a big one. I never would have seen that coming. I caught up with the person I turned to when my faith had major questions and they offered grace filled questions back to help me find answers. Again and again, I ran into people who I remembered from a major moment in my life.

I was reminded that when I was in those hinge moments

those milestone moments

those moments when I was growing into a new phase of life, I needed people there with me.

Many of those people are my church, though few of us ever sat side by side in a pew at the same time.

We have a few people here with us that are going through a time of transition.

Three of you graduated from high school this last week.

At least one of you retired within the last year.

Another one (or more) of you are completing your first year (or week!) in a new job.

I know some of you have lost siblings, grandparents and children in the last year.

Some of you became great grandparents for the first time.

Some of you finished elementary school.

Some of you started a new relationship.

Births, deaths, jobs, relationships, school, moved houses, gave up your driver’s license, it’s transition, after transition, after transition.

So what does the Bible say about that?

Plenty. There's a lot of change and transition in the Bible.

That's where we find Jesus, in the Gospel according to Mark today. Jesus is starting to talk back to the people who tell him, "uh Jesus, you can't do that." His ministry is taking a turn.

For some of the disciples, this turn is a time of realizing who Jesus really is-- someone who will break the rules for healing and then rewrite the rules. God's love and God's healing power doesn't take a break on the Sabbath. Rules are not about to get in the way of compassion. The people are starting to wonder-- he's not just another rabbi. It's a milestone moment.

And milestone moments are tricky things, aren't they?

I've met with most of our confirmands, graduates and recent graduates in the last few weeks.

When I ask them what's next, I get a variety of answers. Some don't know and aren't especially interested in figuring it out. They live each day for that day. Others have a plan (that would have been me). For some the plan is flexible and for others it's carefully thought through and put together one piece at a time.

This is not the only time these young people will have to think about what's next. Right? New career at 60? Newly widowed at 70? You whose grandkids are moving in with you for the summer?

What's next is not a question you stop asking when they hand you your diploma.

But graduates (and everyone else) we here have something to offer you. We are your church.

Remember Pastor Katie, and Devin's mom and my buddy Walter who I caught up with at conference?

They people who were there for me in transitions? My church?

We can be that for you.

And not just for you graduates, but for the newly widowed and the newly divorced and those who lost the best dog ever. Those folks in a time of change. We can be your church.

Here is what we can offer you: **presence, listening and love.**

We can be people who will stick with you, even if we don't necessarily like what you are doing. In the reading from Mark, some of the leaders of Jesus' faith community decide this turn in Jesus' ministry is the time they will break with Jesus. He's going that way, we're going this way.

Unlike those folks who make a break, the disciples wait and watch and hang in there with Jesus even as parts of his own religious family are making a break.

When people are in transition, at hinge points, we as their church can stick with them. **That's presence.**

We will also listen and ask good questions.

We are the experts on ourselves. Inez is an expert on Inez. Darwin is an expert on Darwin. Ashton is an expert on Ashton. Transition moments are times when we are figuring out, remembering and

embracing who we really are. Sometimes we need people who will listen and pay attention to us, sometimes pointing out to us what they see.

If you need help finding words for that, I invite you to consider Psalm 139, which we just heard a small part of. Not only are we experts in us. God is the ultimate expert in us. God sees things in us we have not yet seen for ourselves. God discerns our thoughts from far away. God takes what we are and shows us what we can become. As a church, we can help people listen for God's wisdom about who they are and the direction God is pointing them. Sometimes we use the word "call"

I heard a story about that, which was pretty cool. One of our young people (I'll call her Ann) told me about a talk she had with her dad. What Ann heard from him in the talk was "this is who you are. You aren't going to be you until you are doing that." He had watched her and seen her gifts grow and thought he knew what her call was. In telling her what he saw, he invited Ann to mine her own expert information on who she was and what she was called to. All at age 17.

As church, we can be with people in transition by walking with them as they are figuring out, remembering and embracing who they really are. That walking looks like listening and asking good questions to help them figure it out with their own great wisdom, and God's complete knowledge. **We offer listening.**

And finally, when we are being church to people in transition, we can let them know that wherever they land, God will still love them and they will be welcome in our church. **We offer love.**

God's love for each of us is expansive. Bigger than an elephant, bigger than the US bank stadium, bigger than the ocean.

As a church our task is to bring out that love wherever we are. When we welcome people in for the first time, welcome them back after an absence, when we love, love, love.

Before I wrap things up, I want to say one more thing. We have three graduates here today. How many did Red Wing and Ellsworth graduate? About 300? That's a lot of graduates in transition. We'll never see them in our pews, but they need what we can offer. They need presence, listening and love.

You have friends who will never, ever set foot in church, in all kinds of transition. Guess what?

They need what we can offer. They need presence, listening and love. You are their church. You bring it, you bring presence, listening and love.

Who in your life will you bring presence, listening and love to this week?

Will you pray with me?

Holy One,

People we care about are in transition, and we want to offer more than prayers. We ask that your spirit will fill us and give us just what we need when we are called to walk with people in transition. Help us

be fully present and listen, even when don't quite understand. Give us courage to remind people of God's wisdom with them on this journey. Make your love burst out of us and wash over them. Jesus our friend, help us be present, listen to and love others. We ask this in your name, Amen.