

“Intervention”

Rehab series.¹ 2nd Sunday in Lent

Mark 8:27-38

[28] *Welcome, Prayer.*

[29] At the end of a street we used to live on stands a sign I find amusing. It says, “Road Ends,” with a red diamond below the words to emphasize this simple fact. I chuckle when I see it because: 1) There is a fence at the end of the road, and 2) There is a big lake behind the sign. Seriously, do drivers think, “I wonder if the road is just flooded...oh, wait, the road ends. Of course.” Is the sign supposed to stop an out of control car from taking a dip? I don’t know. I’ve never seen a car drive into that lake, so maybe the sign does work.

There are times in life when it is obvious we should not go in a particular direction. And yet, sometimes we do anyway. We should stop eating unhealthy food – but we take one more bite. We should stop arguing with people – but we have to have the last word. We should put down that remote control, turn the screen off – but we take one more look. Before we know it, we can be trapped in a situation that is beyond our control, like driving into the lake without ever planning on it. When that happens, we need intervention.

[30] Last week we discussed how the season of Lent is like Spring Training for Christians. The forty days before Easter are our spiritual rehab. We discussed the difficulties of rehab – the pain, the struggle against our habits and human nature. Rehab is like entering the wilderness, but at least we have the choice to go there. By contrast, intervention is when someone else takes us into the wilderness, forcing us to change our direction.

[31] I am a firm believer that when we are not following God’s way, we need intervention. God places signs in our lives, but we ignore them. Instead we practice “therapeutic deism.” In effect, we believe that God exists, but we do not pursue a personal relationship with God. As a result, we say things like, “If it feels right, go ahead and do it,” and “Just try to make everyone happy, especially yourself.” The consequence of following our own ways is the same as Adam and

¹ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/lent-2018-worship-planning-series>

Eve eating the forbidden fruit: we die, sometimes literally, instantly, and other times, by a slow poisoning of our souls.

When someone overdoses, intervention is needed. As a church, we need to ask, have we overdosed on our own pride and self-righteousness? Are we seeking God’s way, or have we chosen our own, heedless of the warning signs?

Those are tough questions. We are, after all, in the church of Jesus Christ. Who better to observe God’s signs than those who walk with Jesus?

[32] The disciple Peter stands as a warning example to those of us who would claim we have it all together and do not need intervention. See, Peter was one of us. He was in “the church.” He was part of Jesus’ original twelve disciples. And yet, Peter needed a dose of intervention from Jesus.

[33] We read Peter’s story in Mark 8. This is the story of Jesus teaching his “Sunday School class,” if you will. His “good little students,” the twelve disciples, are taking a “field trip” through Caesarea Philippi. Like any good teacher, Jesus asks them a question to get them thinking. He asks, “Who do people say I am?”

[34] It is no accident that they are near Caesarea Philippi – i.e. “King/Caesar Philip Town.” Even though they are hundreds of miles away from Rome, they are still in the shadow of the Roman emperor. In this place, Jesus asks them, “Who do people say I am?” Can you feel the undercurrent here? Jesus could very well be asking them, “Am I greater than the emperor who had this city named after him?”

[35] The disciples hem and haw over this. They say, “Jesus, people think you are, John the Baptist, Elijah, or a great prophet.” Those are popular answers but incorrect. So Jesus presses them further. “But what about you? Who do you say that I am?”

[36] That’s a significant question. In fact, it may be the most important question you ever answer in your entire life. And Peter, the exemplary Sunday School student, blurts out, “You are the Messiah.” In other words, “You are God-come-to-save-us.” [37] Peter gets the gold star. He can wear the t-shirt: “I confessed Christ and got it right. Caesarea Philippi, AD 30.”

Peter’s confession in the first part of this dialogue makes the second part that much more astounding. [38] Jesus begins to tell the disciples, “This is what

being the Messiah really means. I’m going to suffer, be spit on by the leaders of our own people, be brutally killed, and then (the disciples almost missed this part) rise on the third day.” Jesus is crystal clear. There is no mistaking his words.

[39] And Peter can’t stand it. Look at verse 32. “Peter took [Jesus] aside and began to rebuke him.” How does one even do that? What do you say? “Jesus, a private word, if you please?” Rebuking the Son of God takes a lot of guts, and frankly, a bit of ignorance. Peter, the student, tells Jesus, the Teacher – with a capital T – “There is no way you can let this happen to you!”

[40] So Jesus gives Peter the theological equivalent of a time-out. Jesus says, “Get behind me, Satan!” Those are words of intervention. You see, Peter’s concept of the Messiah was a man of military power, someone who could kick Rome’s butt and bring independence to Israel. And in Peter’s mind, it’s awfully hard to be the heroic Messiah if you are dead.

By contrast, Jesus explains Messiahship means being the suffering servant. The Messiah does not value the things of this world; he is solely focused on God’s plan.

[41] As you read on, you see that Jesus leaves us no room for following our own path anymore. This is the “End of the Road” sign for our pride. “Whoever wants to be my disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34) No wonder this was horrifying to Peter. The Roman historian, Cicero, wrote, "To bind a Roman citizen is a crime; to flog him, an abomination. To slay him is virtually an act of murder. To crucify him is—what? There is no fitting word that can possibly describe a deed so horrible".² Not only was Jesus claiming the cross was his way, this was also the way his disciples must be willing to walk.

[42] There is something else we need to recognize in this passage. This is not a sign only for Peter. “Then [Jesus] called the crowd to him.” Jesus spoke to the crowd, not just to Peter, not to just the disciples. And that means Jesus is speaking to us, here and now, those who would claim to follow Christ.

[43] Has anyone ever intervened in your life? Have they told you, “Get behind me!”? Maybe it was for your own safety. You can’t follow the leader when you are in standing in front of them! When Jesus rebuked Peter, it was with

² Cicero, Against Verres 2.66.170.

the same strong language that he used to rebuke demons, the wind and the waves. Jesus knew his path led to the cross, and no one could stop him.

Obviously, there is a major difference between Peter and demons or storms. When Jesus intervened in Peter’s life, Peter actually listened. Peter allowed Christ to change him. It took some time, but Peter eventually got it. That ought to give us hope that we can get it, too.

Jesus teaches what real discipleship is: denial of self; giving your life to the gospel; following Jesus; listening and obeying Jesus. That is what a disciple does.

[44] Sometimes intervention comes off as very arrogant and self-righteous. We want to say, “Who are you to tell me what to do? I can live my own life!” Listen closely. Jesus has every right to intervene in our lives, because he died a humiliating death to save us. Jesus earned the right to be our Master by willingly sacrificing himself for us. Who do you want to intervene in your life, when you are falling off the road? Don’t you want it to be someone who loves you enough to die for you?

[45] Intervention, wilderness, rehab – they all point to suffering. The truth is, Christians are called to suffer, but Jesus is with us in our suffering, and Jesus is on the other side of our suffering. Think of how this must have impacted the early gospel readers. They were experiencing persecution and death, but their greatest hope was in the One who overcame death forever. That hope propelled them through some really awful stuff.

Rehab takes us to hard places. It confronts parts of our lives we never thought needed correction. To deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus, you must open yourself up to suffering for the sake of Christ. That’s humbling. That’s not easy. Jesus never said it would be.

Allow me to read you this quote from the UMC discipleship website:

[46-49]“Rehab requires that we give up control for the time being and let someone else tell us what to do.... It is humbling to admit that you can’t fix it on your own, that the disease or the evil has gained control over you, and that you need intervention to get out from underneath the weight of your problem. But no matter what difficulties we face, after taking the first step—admitting we have a problem—we have to take the second step of entering into a time of pain and

suffering. The only way to survive is to take a deep breath, trust in the people who love us and in the healing power of grace, and walk bravely into the depths of despair, whatever it may be.... And if we aren't following Jesus into the path that leads to suffering, then we are heading in the wrong direction.”³

[50] Lent gives us the chance to once again move in the right direction. We can change. We can stop being complacent. We can stop putting the values of this world first and instead live for Jesus. Proverbs 3:12 says, “The Lord disciplines those he loves.” There are at least seven other passages in the Bible that express the same thing.⁴ God intervenes because God loves us.

God does not expect us to walk this path alone. Christ leads the way. He walks with us in the suffering. The Holy Spirit guides us through friends, family, doctors, nurses, therapists, fellow church members and even pastors. God gets in our face and says, “No! Go this way. Turn around. Follow me instead.” God leads us through pain, storms, trials and trouble. God is our pillar of fire by night and our pillar of cloud by day. God guides us through the valley of the shadow of death, using his rod and his staff to guide us, and sometimes, bonk us on the head. It's OK. Jesus never expected us to walk a path that he wasn't willing to walk himself. Jesus goes with us and goes before us. And if we open up our hearts to receive his intervention, Christ will bring us out on the other side of rehab to recovery, a glorious and bright Easter day.

Let us pray.

Memory Verse: Proverbs 3:12 - “The Lord disciplines those he loves.”

Reflection Questions:

1. Recall a time when you had to be disciplined (perhaps as a child). How did receiving that discipline change you?
2. When have you intervened in the life of a friend, family member, or coworker?

³ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/lent-2018-worship-planning-series/february-25-2018-intervention-second-sunday-in-lent/second-sunday-in-lent-2018-preaching-notes>

⁴ Hebrews 12:6, Proverbs 3:12, Deuteronomy 8:5, Psalm 94:12, 119:75, Revelation 3:19, Job 5:17, and 1st Corinthians 11:32.

3. Why and how does God intervene in the lives of his children? What does this tell us about God’s love?
4. How can you allow the season of Lent to be a spiritual intervention for you?