

## Through the Woods

### Mark 8:31-38

#### Lost in the Woods?

- Have you found yourself lost in the woods?
- But if you have. It can be scary.
- The woods are sometimes magical. Often mysterious, even dangerous. Sense of disorientation and uncertainty.

Now sometimes **life sends us into the woods**. Our circumstances upend us. Spin us around and we lose our bearings.

- These are times when darkness envelopes us. We're disoriented, confused and we're not sure how to our way out.

And sometimes **Jesus calls us into the woods**. Sometimes He calls us to deeper commitment and invites us on a daring journey into the deep woods.

That brings us to our Scripture text. Mark 8:31-38. In His first passion prediction, Jesus redefines "Christ." Then, he defines discipleship.

- You'll notice that Jesus' words threw **Peter** into the woods. Peter thought Jesus was coming in power! He imagined victory, dominance, a kingly reign! This talk of suffering and death and rejection was not the story Peter told himself. Who was he following? Why was he following? Should he keep following?
- But Jesus wasn't done! He invited everyone into the deep woods. *"For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it."* (v. 35) *If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it.* (NLT)
- Without a doubt people in the crowd were saying, "Wait. What did he just say?"
- Dreams of the good life – of success, and achievement and power and honor, were no different in Jesus' day. You have to "save your life." Secure your own success by building your kingdom.
- Now it's the crowd, not just Peter that is in the deep woods – not sure what to think!

But this is also OUR STORY! Jesus meant what He said and was also talking to us! So, this, is a call to the woods. That place of uncertainty and disorientation. Where we have to decide, "Am I going to follow Jesus all the way no matter what the cost? Am I all in?"

You see, Jesus is calling us to do the reverse of what smart, clever, successful people have taught us?

- Self-fulfillment in whatever form, by whatever means is the ultimate end.
- It's ALL ABOUT ME!!

**Only Way to Life.** So, why would Jesus call us to "lose our lives?" Well, maybe it's the only way to real life!

- Could it be that the journey to an eternal kind of life demands that we make our way into and through the woods?
- Jesus is inviting us into the daring journey we all must take!
- Maybe what we thought was "life" wasn't life at all.
- What we see in our culture is what's been called "aggressive self-regard."
- It's "saving one's life" on steroids. Now the norm.
- Add that to the narrative of **scarcity** that there's only so and so much of power, prestige, possession, love to go around and that can lead to . . .
- Mistrust, competitiveness, **fear**, manipulation, deception, and **violence**. Which can lead to . . .
- Stress, fractured relationships, toxic workplaces, dissatisfaction, and disillusionment.
- How's that life working for us?
- What Jesus is calling for is "death TO self." Not to be confused with death OF self.
- Death to self or self-denial is releasing the desire to have things my way and being open to how God leads me today.

- We're not surprised or offended by not getting what we want.
- It makes way for the eternal kind of life that we were born for.
- Jesus claims that losing our lives – death to self – leads to real life.
- Consider these **passages**: Only if a grain of wheat *dies* in the earth will it *rise up* and bear much fruit; only if we *lose* our life will we experience an *eternal kind of life*; only as we carry around in our bodies the *death of Jesus* will the *life of Jesus* be revealed in our bodies; only as my life becomes *hidden* with Christ in God will I be *revealed* with Christ in glory; only as I become like Jesus in his *death* will I participate in a *resurrected sort of life* here and now today. (Jn 12; 2 Cor 4; Col 3; Phil 3)
- The truth is, to get to real life, we can't skirt the woods.

The journey to an eternal kind of life means losing our lives. **Where we come to terms with that is in the woods.**

- How do we make our way out of the woods? How do we get to the lush meadow of the abundant life that Jesus offers? To the eternal kind of life that we can experience.
- First, we must have the INTENTION to make a change. To turn from the kingdom of me to the kingdom of God.
- It's called "**repentance**." Yes, that word carries a lot of baggage these days. But it means to "rethink our thinking."
- In Romans 12:1-2 Paul calls us to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind."
- In means a turning.
- It's a reorientation. Turning from . . .
- The kingdom of me to the kingdom of God. From building my kingdom vs. to living under God's reign.
- The life orientation couldn't be more opposite.
- I would also suggest some spiritual disciplines such as *solitude* and *fasting*. They teach us to die to self and liberate us to live for Christ and His glory.
- *Service* takes the focus off of ourselves and puts our attention on the needs of others.
- *Generosity* teaches us to hold our possessions loosely, shows us how God supplies all our needs and allows us to be blessed by blessing others.
- Here's an experiment you can practice this week: Work through Psalm 23.
- Our first freedom is the power to choose where we set your mind.
- So, I would invite you to reflect Psalm 23 as soon as your feet touch the floor in the morning.
- Invitation: reorient your life – and make your way through the woods to the . . .
- Lush meadow of abundant life!

**Abundant Life Awaits.** When you emerge from the woods, an eternal kind of life awaits!

- Imagine living a life that is free from having to **get your own way**. It's easier to treat others as you wish to be treated. God meets your needs.
  - You no longer need to **make things happen**. You don't need to control others or be right.
  - Imagine being free from the bondage of **wanting people to like you**. you're free to be transparent, authentic, and vulnerable.
  - Imagine no longer having to **defend yourself**. you're not trying to manage others' opinions. No need to be defensive. You're less filled with anger or contempt and more filled with compassion.
  - Imagine no longer **being obsessed with self**. Pride is replaced with humility. No need to pretend or be impressive.
  - This kind of life is available to you!
  - Freedom, significance, and peace is found in the lush meadow of abundant life.
- Are you tired, of listening to the world tell you to "save your life?" That you need to build your own kingdom? Taking and grasping for power, prestige, and possessions – longing for purpose? But that life has taken life from you!
  - When Jesus calls us to deep commitment, he invites us to a place deep in the woods where we can learn to lose our lives. Only then will we reach the lush meadow of abundant life.