

**Chapel Hill United Church of Christ**

**Sunday Sermon**

# **Let's Get A Move On!**

**March 8, 2009**

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Mark 8:31-38

*"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves  
and take up their cross and follow me."*

By  
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Pastor

*“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”*

Prayer: As we have listened to your Word, help us please, O God, to let its meaning seep into our lives and change us within. Amen.

Thursday a week ago (February 26) CEO Rich Boehne announced to his staff at the Rocky Mountain News that the next day would be their last day of publishing their newspaper. The newspaper company has been in business for one hundred and fifty years, but now, due to multi-million dollar losses, they have shut down forever. “[That] announcement comes as metropolitan newspapers and major newspaper companies find themselves reeling, with plummeting advertising revenues and dramatically diminished share prices. Just this week, Hearst, owner of the San Francisco Chronicle, announced that unless it was able to make immediate and steep expense cuts it would put the paper up for sale and possibly close it. Two other papers, one in Seattle and the other in Tucson, are facing closure in coming weeks (<http://www.rockymountainnews.com/news/2009/feb/26/rocky-mountain-news-closes-friday-final-edition/>, retrieved March 6, 2009).

Back in November, Michael Rosenblum, former producer for CBS News told the Society of Editors in England that print journalists were danger of becoming as obsolete as the New England whalers of the 19th century (<http://mccunications.blogspot.com/2008/11/get-with-program.html>, retrieved March 6, 2009). He basically said that newspaper companies had better reconsider how people get their news, or go out of business. They had better get with the programs of newer technologies, or go bust. They had better get a move on, or get left behind.

It seems to me that message isn't too far off the message Jesus gave to Peter. Jesus had just finished telling the disciples that he was going to suffer at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and the scribes, and his suffering was going to end in his death. But, on the third day he would rise again.

Peter, however, was very stuck in the idea that Jesus was their leader in the effort to remove Roman power from Palestine and restore the long-awaited throne of David. So, Peter rebukes Jesus quite publicly. Matthew's gospel actually quotes Peter's rebuke: "God forbid it, Lord!" said Peter. "This must never happen to you!" (Matthew 16:22).

I love Jesus' response. He knows this is a teaching moment. He looks at his disciples first. Then turns to Peter, and lets him have it. His retort slams Peter outright as he first calls him 'Satan,' and then he accuses Peter that his mind is totally on human things instead of divine things.

But a little lesson in Greek shows us that Jesus' words are not so much a slam on Peter as they are an encouragement for Peter to get on the same page with Jesus' ideas. The word in Greek for 'behind' is the same word for 'follow.' In other words, Jesus said "Get behind me," yes, but he also is saying "...fall in line *behind* me and *follow* me." Get a move on, Peter! Get with the program!

Jesus then goes on to teach some more. He calls the crowd together and teaches them what it means to be obedient to God, what it means to be faithful to God, and what is required to follow God.

Jesus was all about fulfilling God's work which we've come to understand was all about restoring God's relationship with humanity. He was all about people getting God, getting closer to God, developing their relationship with God. He was about enhancing their spiritual lives because the established religion (Judaism as Jesus knew it) was failing in these endeavors.

Jesus taught them that if they desired to get God through him, they would have to put aside their former allegiances. They would have to give up anything that got in the way of getting to God, including a love of themselves, if such a love deterred them from knowing God...including their very lives, if their lives got in the way of having God live in them. They would have to give up old ideas and reprioritize their lives. They were to 1) take up their crosses (the difficulties that come with giving up allegiances), 2) get a move on their faith journeys focused on God, and 3) follow Jesus. His was the way to new life.

If we are to follow Jesus Christ, if we are to get a move on our faith journeys, what lingering practices might we have to give up? What part of ourselves might we have to deny?

Something that stands out which I notice in our society among church-going Christians is spiritual lethargy. Being and becoming sedentary Christians. It seems to me that so many Christians are Christian in name only. Rarely do we hear of people letting the Holy Spirit's power transform their lives as they know it.

There's an intriguing story about the artist Auguste Rodin who is famous for his sculpture "The Thinker." One day, Rodin saw a huge, carved crucifix in someone's yard. He immediately loved the artwork, offered a fair price for it, and arranged to have it hauled back to his house. But, unfortunately, it was too big for his house! So, of all things, he knocked out the walls, raised the roof, and rebuilt his home around that cross! (Sermon Resources for March 8, 2009, [www.esermons.com](http://www.esermons.com), Best Sermons 3, Harper & Row, 1990, p. 115, retrieved March 6, 2009).

What a powerful metaphor! How many of us are willing to let Jesus' Holy Spirit transform our lives like that? How many of us are willing to knock down

old walls and rebuild our lives around Christ? Or, are we more likely to remain just as we are, not letting God's Spirit move us toward engagement with God on a daily basis?

None of us are instant Christians, folks. None of us are made exactly as God desires right away. You might remember the comedian Yakov Smirnoff. He was from Russia and liked to make jokes about American life in comparison to life in Russia. When he first came to the US from Russia, he was not prepared for the incredible variety of instant products available on the shelves of American grocery stores. He said, "On my first shopping trip, I saw powdered milk—you just add water, and you get milk. Wonderful! Then I saw powdered orange juice—you just add water, and you get orange juice! And then I saw baby powder and I thought to myself, "What a country!" (Sermon Resources for March 8, 2009, [www.esermons.com](http://www.esermons.com), retrieved March 6, 2009).

Smirnoff is joking of course, but the point is, none of us are 'powder Christians.' It takes work, effort, and sometimes trials and temptations to be a Christian. All of us are works in progress.

That means that we must practice our faith. Sitting in our sanctuary doesn't make anyone a Christian. We are to get a move on with an ongoing prayer life, daily devotion time, saying grace before or after meals. Can we to give up being used to spiritual lethargy and denying its presence in our lives. We are to take up our cross and get a move on in following Jesus, letting his Holy Spirit transform us.

Here at Chapel Hill, our ministry can assist us in the process of giving up spiritual lethargy. Here we are in the season of Lent. This season places some spiritual demands on us. Why not combat spiritual lethargy by attending what we provide here? Why not give God more time on Wednesday evenings for brief worship experiences during Lent? Why not practice faith growth by attending Bible study and book study and Sunday school classes designed to grow faith? Why not be serious about growing faith in our children? Why not do everything in our capabili-

ties to bring our children to church and Sunday School?

Let's get a move on combating sedentary spirituality. Let's get with God's program. Let's follow in line with Jesus and give up anything and everything that might get in the way of God's love and life growing within us. For if we lose all that for the sake of Jesus and the sake of the good news, we will find all that we would ever need and more!

Let's be quiet and think and pray. Amen.