

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

An Epic Walk with Jesus

(Colossians 2:6)

Study #1

Introduction: On taking a walk...

Last week, I took our dog, Scout, who is a big, lovable Black Labrador mix, on a walk in our neighborhood. We saw some birds and said “Hello” to some friendly neighbors.

It was a nice walk. I like to take walks. The walk with Scout was a nice, short, calm, sedate walk. And then there are other walks.

In August of 2016, I took a walk with my sons, Ben and Zach.

We spent the better part of a year preparing to take this walk. I bought some new hiking and camping gear and trained hard to get in good shape. I even dehydrated some meals to eat on the trail.

This walk lasted six days and took us over sixty miles through a part of the northern Rockies known as the Wind River Range, in Wyoming. During just about all of this trek, we were above 10,000 feet elevation.

We crossed the Continental Divide twice, did some Class 3 scrambling with full packs, hiked across a half-mile wide glacier, and hiked over one pass in a snowstorm (yes, August).

Now, our plan had been to be out for seven days, not six. My altitude sickness got in the way. It kept me from eating or drinking much of anything for the last four days of the trip. And that required us to get to lower elevations.

We hiked to a trailhead overnight with headlamps through grizzly bear and mountain lion habitat.

Two hikes. Each one involving putting one foot in front of the other, but very different kinds of hikes. The hike through our neighborhood was simple and easy. The hike through the Winds was what I have come to refer to as an “epic journey.”

Epic journeys are the “stock-in-trade” of great literature and many great movies.

Kathy and I are in the middle of re-watching the Lord of the Rings trilogy, an “epic journey” story about destroying a ring of power.

The Star Wars movies tell the story of an epic journey of some intrepid warriors battling evil with good. Harry Potter walks through one challenge after another on the way to finally vanquishing Lord Voldemort.

From Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey to the TV series, “Lost” to “Friends” and “The Office” (just wanted to see if you’re still with me), the epic journey captures and excites our imagination.

Today, we’re thinking about taking a walk. And our memory verse for the month of January describes life with Jesus as a walk.

Receiving and walking with Jesus...

[Colossians 2:6] As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.

When you hear Colossians 2:6, what images flash into your mind? Paul writes, ***“As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord...”***

So, how do we receive Christ Jesus the Lord?

Well, it is by faith. You believe and then receive the Lord Jesus Christ. You put your faith in Jesus and He gave you L-I-F-E!

Paul's point is clearly that having begun life with Jesus by faith, we are to continue living by faith.

Now, does that "walk" bring to mind a sedate, tranquil, walk through the neighborhood or an epic journey through the Rockies that will tax you to the limit?

Well, let's consider some of what was involved when you ***"received Christ Jesus the Lord."***

Before you received Him, you were estranged, alienated from God. You lived under His condemnation because of your sin.

You were lost, without hope, and unable to self-rescue. You needed a Rescuer powerful enough to free you from your predicament. The only One powerful enough to rescue you from God's condemnation was the Lord Jesus.

Only a Lord is powerful enough to save and He is the LORD of Lords! Jesus did for you what you could have never done for yourself.

On the cross, He took upon Himself your guilt and bore the wrath of God for you. At the end, He cried out, ***"It is finished!"*** The price was paid to effect reconciliation between you and Almighty God.

And to prove His Lordship, Jesus conquered death and rose from the grave.

Now, all that happened two thousand years ago.

But, in your life, at some point, you became aware that Jesus was offering you a gift. It's the gift of eternal life. Maybe that was years ago. Maybe, it's right now that you are coming alive to the thought that abundant and eternal life is available to you through Jesus.

If it was a while ago, you'll remember that God brought people into your life to share the Good News that eternal life, purpose, meaning, joy, and forgiveness were all possible.

They told you - just as I am saying now - that there was nothing you could DO to merit this.

Jesus paid the extravagant price you could never have paid and now He offers eternal life to you as a gift.

The more you heard about this amazing gift and the love behind it, the more you began to soften. The cross of Jesus began to look more and more beautiful.

You began to see that God was offering to give you exactly what you needed, even exactly what you now long for.

Eternity was hanging in the balance.

You had been hopeless, and you set your hopes on Jesus. Or, you had been hoping in your own merit to get you in good with God and you turned from that foolishness to Jesus.

And in an instant, your sins were wiped away and you were washed clean, the Holy Spirit took up residence in your soul, you became a new creation in Jesus, you became a daughter or a son of God because Christ Jesus, the Lord you received, saved your eternal soul.

So, again... ***[Colossians 2:6] As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.***

That's not a description of a walk on a suburban street. "Walking in Jesus" is a call to an epic journey! Life with Jesus begins big. And, according to our verse, it is to continue big.

Your mission, our mission...

Beginning today and continuing through most of February, we're going to be clarifying what is our church's mission. It's really the mission of every church, but we have a certain way of saying it here.

We help you take "next steps" with Jesus...

...so that you can help others take "next steps with Jesus."

That statement views the Christian life as a walk with Jesus, a walk that will consist of a lifetime of “next steps” into faithfulness, love, service, and obedience.

That was certainly the walk the first disciples took with Jesus. For instance, let’s look at the walk with Jesus the Apostle Peter took.

PETER - Walking with Jesus

Leaving Nets to Walk with Jesus (Matthew 4:18-20)

One day, Simon (his given name) was minding his own business, which was fishing in the Sea of Galilee. He and his brother, Andrew, were mending nets after a night of work. Then this happened.

[Matthew 4:18] Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. [19] And He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” [20] Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.

Simon left his nets, and began following Jesus. For three solid years, everywhere Jesus went, Simon (or Peter) went.

He walked with Jesus from village to village through the region of Galilee. They would occasionally walk south to Judea and go to Jerusalem and Bethany.

Their walks sometimes took them outside of Israel, east to the Decapolis, north to Caesarea Philippi, and to the in-between state of Samaria.

That’s a lot of walking. But, as Peter walked with Jesus, he learned about Jesus.

Learning as He Walked with Jesus

Learning about Jesus’ power

Believing that He was a rabbi worth following, Peter was stunned when Jesus miraculously turned water into wine at a wedding in the town of Cana. That was where Peter began to believe that Jesus was something more than a rabbi. (John 2:11)

On hikes through cities and towns, Peter watched Jesus cleanse lepers and cast out demons. He saw Jesus heal the sick of diseases, make the lame walk, the deaf hear, and the blind see.

Peter climbed a mountain with Jesus and saw Him, appearing with Moses and Elijah, transfigured into a brilliant radiance. He was there when Jesus multiplied a few fish and loaves to feed thousands - twice! And once, when he went boating across the Sea of Galilee, he watched as Jesus walked toward Him on the waves.

Peter also learned about Jesus’ love as he walked with Him.

Learning about Jesus’ love

He talked about love when He spoke to crowds. He showed love when He dealt one-on-one.

The least and the last and the lost were His friends. He enjoyed meals with tax-collectors and prostitutes. He told stories that connected with the poor.

As they walked together, Peter grew. He became a better man. Never a perfect man. He had obvious flaws and his failures are the stuff of legend. But Jesus was changing Peter, from the inside out.

At a certain point - probably early on in this walk - He saw Jesus as trustworthy and trusted Him, the obvious Lord, as His Savior.

And then, after nearly three years of this walk, Peter came to understand Jesus’ mission. The way he came to “get it” was through disruption.

Learning about Jesus' mission

He was there in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested. Peter didn't walk away. He RAN off into the night. He wasn't present when Jesus was crucified, but he knew of Jesus' death.

And Peter thought the story was over. Jesus had failed in His mission to re-establish the Jewish Kingdom.

...and then came Sunday. Again, Peter didn't walk, he RAN to the tomb when Mary told him, ***"I've seen the Lord!"*** Peter would soon see Him. At the tomb, all he saw was emptiness - but that was enough.

He went away, marveling at what had happened. Jesus was alive and some forty days later he received the promised Holy Spirit who empowered him to serve, to love, to obey.

Leading Others to Walk with Jesus

Peter walked with Jesus and was transformed. After Jesus left, Peter gave his life to helping others walk with Jesus.

Jesus' personal commission to Peter was to tend His sheep, feed His lambs. (See John 21) And Peter did that well, all the way to the end, when he died a martyr's death for being faithful to Jesus.

Peter's long walk with Jesus was never frantic, but it was intense and purposeful. What began with the simple act of walking away from his nets turned into quite the epic journey.

That's Peter. There were others. The New Testament is filled with stories of those whose walks with Jesus were epic adventures.

One of them was another apostle: Paul.

PAUL - Walking with Jesus

In His Epic Life

We enter Paul's story as he is opposing, jailing, and even killing Christians. Very quickly, the persecutor became the persecuted.

Converted after Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus, Paul turned from being the church's Enemy #1 to being the apostle to the Gentile world.

Three missionary journeys later, after many miles walked making disciples, establishing churches and suffering, we mark Paul's life down as epic.

But what I want to pause long enough to notice this morning is that in the letters he wrote to churches just like ours, he consistently called Christians to a "walk" with Jesus (think "epic journey"!) into holiness and love and faithfulness and service.

Just listen as I read from some of Paul's letters.

In His Writings¹

[Galatians 5:16] But I say, WALK by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh...[25] If we live by the Spirit, let us also WALK by the Spirit.

[Ephesians 2:10] For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would WALK in them.

[Ephesians 4:1] Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to WALK in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, [2] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, [3] being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

[Ephesians 5:1] Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; [2] and WALK in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

¹ See also John 8:12; Acts 21:21-25; Romans 6:4; 8:3-4; 1 Corinthians 7:17; Ephesians 4:17; Philippians 3:17-19; Colossians 1:9-12; 1 John 1:6; 2:6; 2 John 6.

[Ephesians 5:7] Therefore do not be partakers with them; [8] for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; WALK as children of Light

[Ephesians 5:15] Therefore be careful how you WALK, not as unwise men but as wise, [16] making the most of your time, because the days are evil.

[1 Thessalonians 2:12] so that you would WALK in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

[1 Thessalonians 4:1] Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to WALK and please God (just as you actually do WALK), that you excel still more.

[2 Corinthians 5:7] for we WALK by faith, not by sight—

Paul imagines the Christian life as a long walk. It's a walk into holiness, a walk with the Spirit, a walk into love and good deeds and wisdom, a walk into faith.

One foot in front of the other, one step after another. We've seen Simon Peter's epic journey and we've listened to Paul's words. Now it comes to us.

For you and for me, life in Jesus is a life of "next steps" with Jesus.

YOU - Walking with Jesus

The Bible is clear that no matter where you are on your spiritual journey, Jesus calls you to follow Him, walk with Him, take "next steps" with Him.

And who is to say that all the epic journeys with Jesus should be taken by first century apostles?

Why not you? What will be your next step with Jesus?

My experience...

Speaking personally, I have spent decades taking next steps with Jesus. Some have been backward steps and some have been steps out of ditches I've gotten myself in to.

But these days, my intentional "next steps" with Jesus are being directed two ways.

First, I'm looking to nurture relationships with people into whose lives I want to press Jesus. I'm praying more for people who are close to me. I'm pursuing conversations and connection. Life's too short to NOT look for ways to be contagious about Jesus - and that's a big part of my own current "next step" journey.

But there is a second part. Recently, I'm feeding a growing passion for people of every tongue, tribe, and nation to hear about and to come to Jesus.

Some of this passion was sparked by a thirteen-week course Kathy and I took last year called Perspectives on the World Christian Movement. Part of it has to do with the excitement of having Encuentro and ESL here at our church. Part of it has to do with books I'm reading and what I'm seeing in Scripture.

But I, personally want to reach out to the great diversity of humanity for Jesus' sake and I want to see us, together, do the same.

I'm taking next steps and a lot of you are taking next steps, too.

My observations...

There are a bunch of folks I see in our church who are battling challenges and learning to depend on God to do what only He can do as they ask Him.

For one thing, there are those who are facing serious illness and debilitating, chronic pain. Health challenges have put them on an epic, roller-coaster journey of faith.

Others of you are suffering financial shortfalls or demanding jobs. You pray. You stay faithful to God. You take giant steps of faith, just like you did when you received Christ Jesus the Lord.

Some of you are taking next steps in your relationships. It's tempting to hang with people where relationships tend to work well and to avoid being with people you have to work hard to love. I get it.

But being loving and genuine and transparent and honest in a tough relationship is to embark on an epic hike. I know some of you are working on challenging marriages and extended family ties and friendships. God smiles as you take these steps.

I know some people are just beginning a journey with Jesus. They are learning about Him, just like Peter did when he left his nets. They have started off on a really exciting journey, one that I'm praying will soon lead to receiving Christ Jesus the Lord as their Savior.

So, are you on the "next step" trail?

My exhortation...

Jesus is inviting you into an epic journey. Can you point to steps you're currently taking with Him?

There are next steps you can take into prayer and dependence, into learning and obeying the Bible, building faith at home, bringing a friend to Jesus, living and giving generously, or relating genuinely.

There are next steps into holiness and love and faith and service that will lead you to the life Jesus saved you to live.

And here's the rest of the story when it comes to taking an epic journey with Jesus. It's not only about you pursuing personal growth. It's also about bringing others along with you. It's about you helping others take their own next steps with Jesus.

US - Walking with Jesus

The text that our church's Mission Statement is based on is found in Matthew 28.

Speaking to His first disciples, Jesus said,

[18] "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Those verses are often simply referred to as The Great Commission, and I'm going to talk about it a lot more next Sunday.

I just want to highlight two things from the Great Commission today.

First, Jesus' Great Commission is a call to a team sport.

The Church as "Team"

Wherever disciples go, they are to make disciples. And wherever there are disciples, they are to be making more disciples - together.

Gatherings of disciples (we call them "churches") are to be gatherings of disciple-makers.

So, our church is a collection of people from lots of different walks of life, including English and Spanish speakers, male and female, young and old.

And, as a church, we carry out lots of activities: worship services, ABFs, Care Groups, Missions, Men's and Women's events and studies, a youth group, kids Sunday Schools, a nursery - and more.

All the activities we host, we host to promote next steps with Jesus. That's our purpose.

If the point of a Spurs game is to have more points at the end than their opponents, then the "point" of an hour of Sunday School, and of a youth retreat, and of this hour together is that those present take a next step with Jesus.

You are a member of this team. And as a member of this team, you are called to take next steps with Jesus AND you are called to help others take next steps with Jesus.

That thought leads me to address a possible thought forming in your mind. And it just so happens to be a thought addressed in the Great Commission.

No Benchwarmers

You might be thinking something like, *“I can’t”* or *“I’m not ‘up’ to that”* or *“There’s no way”* or *“Others, maybe, but not me”*.

If those are your thoughts, listen to the verses in Matthew 28 right before Jesus gave the Great Commission.

[Matthew 28:16] But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. [17] When they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some were doubtful.

Were some of them on that mountain thinking, *“I can’t”* or *“I’m not ‘up’ to that”* or *“There’s no way”* or *“Others, maybe, but not me”*.

Maybe. But it didn’t matter. Jesus went ahead and commissioned them anyway.

Which was to say that even if some of those original disciples didn’t think they were up to helping others take next steps with Jesus, Jesus thought otherwise. He knew that with His presence and with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, they were fully up to the task.

And He knows that even if you think, *“No way!”*, armed with His truth and His presence, and equipped with the Spirit’s power, you have all you need to do all that He commands, too.

Conclusion:

So, I close with a guarantee.

It’s not a guarantee of “success” in every attempt you make to make a difference in someone else’s life for Jesus. Epic journeys are filled with “iffyness”.

For proof, when I went on that trip to Wyoming in 2016, things happened that I hadn’t foreseen, requiring adjustments to the trip’s itinerary.

Another way to say that is that I failed to do all that I set out to do.

I didn’t cross Europe Canyon, didn’t cross over the pass at Mount Bonneville, didn’t climb Texas Pass or see the Cirque of the Towers or hike over (if I can use this term) Jackass Pass.

But other things happened while on this epic journey...

While suffering from altitude sickness on the trail, I saw my two adult sons kick in to a gear - *“Save the old man”* mode - I’d never seen before.

They showed leadership and compassion. They made quick, smart decisions. Those things had never been necessary on a trek before, but came alive because of my poor health.

And, even though we didn’t do all that we had planned, I’m so glad we made the attempt at “epic.” It was great to go for broke and try something outrageous. If we hadn’t aimed high, we would have never walked over a glacier.

And, yes, I’m disappointed that we didn’t do everything we had planned. But, in retrospect, eighteen months after the fact, I’m OK. Failure didn’t prove fatal. That’s not a bad lesson learned.

How many times, in carrying out a ministry plan - for a kids’ event, a High School campout, a missions trip, sharing Jesus with a friend - do things NOT work out as you had hoped, planned, and prayed?

And then, when you look back at the event, you realize that you saw God move in a way that was unexpected.

Because God is sovereign, failing to accomplish our stated goal will likely result in a big win elsewhere. Watch for it. He's always at work.

The guarantee is not that whatever you try to do for Jesus will happen. The guarantee is that God is always at work AND that there is no life like the life given to Jesus' mission.