



The sooner we come to understand that God is not bound by earthly rules and norms the better.

There was absolutely no earthly reason our house in Wisconsin sold this past week. We had three people look at it in four months, and that was called “a good level of activity.” It was 18 below zero the day Julie signed the accepted offer papers. People just don’t buy houses in the dead of winter.

I tried to think of an earthly reason. The only possible thing I could think of was that I wasn’t there so Julie was able to have it perfectly clean and staged. That doesn’t cut it. The sale of our house was God working out of the box.

A few years back my family had a couple of days in Madison waiting to hear our oldest daughter sing with the Wisconsin State Honors Choir. We made it a family affair. Julie’s parents flew in from southern California to be with us. My dad and his wife drove over from Spooner. We got our hotel room. The next morning I asked my youngest daughter how she slept. She said, “Dad, you were snoring so loud I couldn’t sleep. I prayed to God that you would stop snoring, and you stopped. Prayer works Dad.” I am so pleased that I could plan out that faith building moment with my daughter to strengthen her faith!

God works in our lives in spontaneous unplanned out-of-the-box ways. The sooner we come to accept this, even watch for it each day, the more we will make a difference in the world and be used by God.

In a 2009 article in *Time* magazine, writer Coco Masters shared a startling statistic: one in five Japanese men and women have seriously considered taking their lives, and each year over the past decade, more than 30,000 people have killed themselves in that country. But Masters surrounded those troubling statistics with the story of Yukio Shige. It’s because of Shige that at least 188 Japanese men and women have chosen life over death.

Every day since 2004, Shige, a retired detective, has roamed the Tojinbo Cliffs, a popular site for suicide attempts along the coast of the Sea of Japan, looking for people who are considering jumping. If he spots someone in need, he slowly approaches them, offers a gentle “hello,” and then does his best to engage them in some conversation. At some point Shige will offer them a light touch on the shoulder, which almost always causes the person to burst into tears. Shige will then softly say, “You’ve had a hard time up until now, haven’t you?”

The beauty of Shige’s work doesn’t end there, though. He will often take the person back to an office (which he rents for \$800 a month) for counseling sessions. Masters writes: “There’s no rush in Shige’s office. He offers those who go there *oroshimochi*, a dish of pounded sticky rice served with grated relish. Traditionally the food is prepared to celebrate the New Year, with each family taking its own rice to be mixed with that of its neighbors. ‘When people come here and eat mochi, they remember their childhood—father, mother, siblings, hometown. They remember they’re not alone,’ Shige says.”

Toward the end of her article, Masters points out, rather nonchalantly, that the ring tone for Shige’s cell phone is set to “Amazing Grace”—which seems the perfect choice. Shige sums up his mission this way: “I want Tojinbo to be the most challenging place, not where life ends, but where it begins.”

You know what? God has placed us in the most challenging places. In reality we live and work in Tojinbo places every day. Challenging places, not places where we cynically conclude life ends here, this is hopeless.... but in that most challenging place on that cliffside of despair, that is where life begins. In that valley, in that pain, God delivers his amazing grace. And he does it through retired Japanese detectives and he wants to do it through us. As C.S. Lewis said, pain is God’s megaphone.

I want us to go to a cliffside right now. It’s a most challenging place. For many it was a place where life ends. It had been a place of Greek pagan worship of the god Pan, where worship led to offering child sacrifices. People offered sacrifices to Pan the Greek God of nature. It was a place where people bowed down to nature and worshipped created things and turned their back on the creator.

In Jesus’ day the place was called Caesarea Philippi. Herod the Great, the appointed governor over this area, built a temple there to honor his boss Caesar Augustus, the supreme divine ruler of the Roman Empire. Caesar was worshipped in the temple. When Herod the Great died at the time of Jesus’ birth, Herod gave his son Philip that area to rule. He made sure his son knew that he should never cross Caesar and to continue to maintain the temple in his honor. In Philip’s day the place became known as Caesarea Philippi.

It was a beautiful place where the Jordan River actually started flowing. It was 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. It was at the foot of the snow covered Mt. Hermon, and fresh cold water

flowed out from underground springs. When I was there in July it was a place where locals would congregate at the heat of the day and have picnics and splash their feet in the cool water.

So it's in this incredibly beautiful place, this most challenging place, this out-of-the-box place on a cliffside where pagan worship lead to death and destruction that Peter answers the question Jesus poses to him. And it was at this place where life ends, that in reality, life was to begin.

The Church was Revealed in an Incredible Place

“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say the Son of Man is?’” (v. 13)

We have to understand the significance of this question. It was a direct attempt to confront the kingdoms of this world. This was not about building a wall around them and keeping the bad people away if they got the answer right. This was an out-of-the-box attack by Jesus the aggressor on pagan ways that lead to death. The Hollywood movie maker, your neighbor, a media person, a coworker, a politician, your cousin, 40% of all Americans believe all religions teach equally valid truth.

It says he begins to question his disciples. His question is something like, “What do the polls say? Who do people say I am?” Son of Man was the most common name that Jesus called himself. The Jews associated the name “Son of Man” to the Messiah. A good Jew when he heard “Son of Man” he thought of Daniel's vision in Daniel chapter 7. Why did Jesus prefer Son of Man as the name for himself on earth? Son of Man refers to the human side of the messiah. It's a humble name describing a suffering servant who would lead a humble life and suffer much on earth. Not like Caesar, not on a chariot, crushing anyone who stood in his way. No, this leader Jesus was revealing himself as a leader out of the earthly box of leaders. This leader was characterized by humility and suffering.

The Church was Revealed with an Incredible Confession

“They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’” (v. 14)

So the poll revealed some thoughtful answers to the question, “Who do you say that I am?” Some said, “I think he is John the Baptist back from the grave.” Jesus had said that John was the greatest prophet that ever lived, but not the Son of Man.

Others say Elijah. We are all learning wonderful lessons from Elijah's colorful life through the preaching series. Many Jewish people had expected Elijah to return to them prior to the Messiah's coming. In modern Passover celebrations, if I am not mistaken, the Passover meal is celebrated with an extra empty chair at the family table in the hope of Elijah coming to announce the Messiah's arrival.

Others say Jeremiah. This was according to an urban legend of the day, that Jeremiah somehow took the Ark of the Covenant and altar of incense out of the Temple to prevent them from being desecrated during the Babylonian captivity. The legend said Jeremiah would return to restore the temple items prior to the establishment of the messianic kingdom.

One of the Prophets. We have no way of knowing which ones, but I suppose each had their favorite and wore their jerseys to their religious festivals!

But they all had the same thing in common. The polls revealed the same thing. They thought Jesus was the forerunner of the messiah, not the messiah himself. Even today, very few would say that Jesus was not a great man. Jesus being a great man does not talk people down from the cliff. But life begins on that cliff with Peter's confession. Jesus asks,

“But what about you? he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’”

“Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.’” (verses 15–16)

Right there on that cliff next to the temple dedicated to worshiping Caesar, who ironically Caesar himself was called the Son of God, we hear Peter's incredible confession. Caesar isn't the Son of God; you are the Son of God, Jesus. Caesar is dead; you are the Son of the Living God. I turn away from Caesar worship, from nature worship, and I find life in you. You made all this beauty around me. I worship you—the Christ, Messiah, the Anointed One, the Holy One of Israel, the Deliverer, Son of God, perfectly connected, one nature and one essence with the one true God, the Creator.

God has called each of us to live out our faith and proclaim this essential confession. You Jesus are not just a great guy, a great teacher, a great man among great men of history. You are the Christ, the son of the living God. If we have made that confession we are linked to Christ, we are brought into Christ's church. How do we know? We know by Jesus' response to Peter's confession.

The Church was Revealed with an Incredible Affirmation

“Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, (Simon was Peter's name before Jesus changed it when he became a follower of Jesus. Why would Jesus refer back and call him Simon here? He wanted to show Peter that he didn't get his confession right because he was smart and reasoned it out through human reasoning.) for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.’” (v. 17)

This confession was through God's spirit touching Peter's open heart. By grace not by works that we are saved. There is no place for a personal pat on the back. Our salvation, even our capacity to believe, and then the will to step up and actually believe is a

gift from God, not because we are brilliant and insightful people that God needs on his team to win.

Look at what Jesus feels after hearing Peter's confession. He is so pleased. Jesus offers this incredible affirmation of Peter with all his screw ups and sin. Wasn't it Peter when he first met Jesus who said, "Go away from me, for I am a sinful man."? Yes it was. And Jesus answered him, "Don't be afraid, for now on you won't just catch fish, you will catch men." Amazing grace shown to Peter. Peter, you will go to the top of the cliff, to the most challenging place where life dead ends for lost people, but where I make it begin? And you will catch men. You will show those who follow you, the future church, what it means to be the church. Those who follow you will have go to the most challenging places to catch people who are perishing with ring tones that hum *Amazing Grace*. They may be afraid but you will inspire them to be the church out of the box. And for those of us who are challenged today to be the church out of the box, and are afraid, be encouraged by these next two verses.

The Church was Revealed with an Incredible Foundation

"And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church... (v. 18a)

What holds up the church? Jesus uses a play on words to make his point. He goes back to Peter. Peter in the Greek is *petros*, which means "small stone." And on this rock, *Petra*, I will build my church. Petra means "big rock."

So Jesus is saying, I tell you that you are Peter (petros—small rock) and on this rock (petra—big rock) I will build my church. The idea is that Peter is a rock chip, a piece that represents the larger group. Certainly Peter has a special place in the church because Jesus points him out because of his confession. Special but not primary. In 1 Peter 5:1 he says he is an elder among elders, but no greater than the others. He also is identified as an apostle in the very first sentence of his first letter.

Another apostle, Paul, tells the church, "*You are members of God's household, built on the foundations of the apostles and the prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone*" (Ephesians 2:19-20). We see all around us foundations of earthly kingdoms getting chipped away. As I stood among the ruins of Caesarea Philippi I thought about history. The kingdoms that ruled that land, the modern day Golan Heights, for the past 4000 years were Hebrew, Greek, then Roman, then Christian, then Muslim, then Christian again, Syrian, and now Jewish. Archeologists dig up layer after layer of civilizations that thought they had solid foundations. But instead they represent dead civilizations because Christ was not the cornerstone.

The church was revealed with an incredible foundation and then by an incredible builder.

The Church was Revealed by an Incredible Builder

"I will build..." (v. 18a)

He is the architect, engineer, contractor, stone mason, and laborer of the church. Do you see the encouragement offered us as we seek to serve God in the most challenging places, not where life can end, but where life can begin again?

It hit me as I was driving on Friday to visit Mt. Hermon preparing for our Men's Retreat. Over and over in my mind church stuff was playing. And the Lord reminded me that it wasn't my ministry to build; Jesus builds the church. This is his plan, his desire, his power at work.

What a relief it is to know that we don't need to carry that burden. God is in control of his church. What a laughable thought to think that I am desperately needed to make the church work. Who do I think I am? God is the incredible builder and he is creating an incredible family.

Creating an Incredible Family

"my church..." (v. 18a)

When Jesus says "my church" he means that it is "his church." He is the head of it. Church literally means "called out ones." I remember back in the day when I worked with reinforcing steel. We would fabricate and install the rebar in the foundation before they would pour the concrete. By far the heaviest steel was buried deep in the foundation, often piling was drilled deep down into the ground. It held the building up against earthquakes and floods. The walls really didn't hold up much accept themselves. The weight of the roof would travel down beams inside the walls and the foundation would take the load. There is very little steel reinforcement in these walls, but instead in beams, pads, footings buried under us that we cannot see.

I thought about that. Walls do serve a purpose. They give shape and definition to the building. Then I remembered—Peter must have thought a lot about what our role is in the church. He describes us a living stones in the wall (1 Peter 2:5). We have our place. We are privileged to be mortared together in a community, and we are always growing, changing and expanding under that solid foundation as the master builder sees fit. We are held up by Christ as the cornerstone and the word of God from God to the prophets and apostles.

So as I was driving home I thought, relax. God's in control of his church. He doesn't require my expertise, he doesn't even require me. He just desires to use me and grow me.

The Church was Revealed with Incredible Power over Evil

Jesus said, "...and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." (v. 18b)

At first glance we think, seal the gates, get behind the walls, the enemy Satan is on the attack, hunker down. Then if you look

closer he says **gates**. Gates are not instruments of war. I have never seen anyone attack someone by firing a gate at them. The purpose of gates is to hide behind, to keep an enemy out.

What Jesus is saying is that the church is to be on the offensive. We are not to hunker down in the box. We are to advance out of the box into enemy territory. The enemy is the one compelled to hunker down. The church out of the box means we are on the move, invading and establishing beachheads and then moving inland into the most challenging places to touch people so they can find out where life begins again.

Well, who am I? What authority do I have?

The Church was Revealed with an Incredible Moral Authority

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (v. 19)

Jesus is telling Peter and followers of Christ down through the ages that we not only have the responsibility, we also have the authority to declare God's glory, to share the way of salvation, to determine fruit, to baptize, to condemn sin, to discipline those whom God loves and needs correction.

So a question I ask myself is: Do my actions and my attitudes as well as my words preach Christ? Then I asked these three questions as I was praying through what it means to be the church out of the box.

Would anyone miss us if we weren't here? It's always a blessing to participate in a memorial service for a Christian who made a real difference in the lives around them. It touches my heart to see that a person will be missed by a lot of people. A few years ago Julie and I attended a memorial service for the elderly father of a young family in our church in Wisconsin. There was a line of people around the block waiting to get in and pay their respects to the family. We waited with hundreds of other people in the cold to get in and pay our respects.

So I thought about the church. If our church, if Central Peninsula Church were to disappear, many of us in this place would miss and grieve our loss, but would the community care? Did we make a difference? Would they rather have us or more condos? Does it matter to anyone outside the church that we are gone? This is an honest question to ask a church trying to be a church out of the box.

Do our hearts break for the suffering and lost? Do they? Do they really?

Do we have a clear mission? Do I really believe what the Bible says, that hell is real and that the priority of the church is to depopulate hell? Have we let our inward focused ministries outweigh our energies and efforts toward those in the most challenging places?

Steve Kinstler has his office right across the hall from me. Steve is part of our CPC-wide ministries so he serves all three campuses. He has many different ministries that he oversees. Steve and his ministries really encapsulate to me the church in the most challenging places to meet people in places where life is tragically ending and help them see that life can begin again. I want you to meet Steve and be encouraged by what he brings to our church. Also, I want you to be aware of the specific ways you can be involved in being the church out of the box through Mercy Ministries at CPC. *(interview with Steve Kinstler)*

Look at this picture. This is another Caesarea. This is Caesarea Maritime. It is on the northwestern coast of Israel on the Mediterranean near the city of Tyre. Looking out we face northwest toward Europe. This is the place where Paul launched his missionary journeys to Europe. This is what he saw when he left the box and walked up the gangplank as he left the box. Hundreds if not thousands of missionaries more went to Europe, others northeast to Asia and others southwest to Africa and the rest is history.

Today we have Christ in our lives. We were in a place expected to end in death, but instead it became a place of new life. We have Christ in our lives today because Paul got on a boat at Caesarea Maritime. This picture inspires us. What is the picture you will leave to inspire the next generation to be The Church Out of the Box?

*The Yukio Shige story from Coco Masters quoted from Brian Lowery, managing editor, PreachingToday.com; source: Coco Masters, Postcard: Tojinbo Cliffs, *Time* (6-22-09), p. 6

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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