**Coronado Community Church**

*The Responsibility of Being Amazingly You*

Mark 9:38-50

A message by Pastor Eric Smith

September 25, 2022

Our reading from the Gospel of Mark is a collection of Jesus’ sayings. They are warnings about maintaining good relationships with others. The centerpiece of the passage is this…

*42“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.*

Mark’s plan in using these sayings was to remind (if not warn) followers that there were others who were doing God’s works and they came from other places and held differing perspectives.

That’s a good word for us. Whether it is about religious groups who have theologies that we can’t embrace, or individuals who go who go about life in ways that are very different from our own. We can value and appreciate the differences of others. But the place we have to start is in valuing and appreciating the otherness of ourselves.

Each of us is a unique human being. We’re quite similar to one another in physiology and in the common connecting points of human experience… but each of us is completely distinctive in our personhood.

I remember one of the sayings in my high school yearbook written by a friend who probably used it in every yearbook he signed… he wrote

*God made heat*

*God made cold*

*When God made you*

*He threw away the mold.*

It’s true.

The Psalmist captured it like this,

*I am fearfully and wonderfully made*

(Psalm 139)

There is never a fully finished product. There is a life-long process… an unending journey of our becoming.

This is not a new idea for you, but it’s important to visit and revisit the idea, because it is always true.

We continue to become ourselves. It happens throughout our lives… no matter how old we are… and this goes on even after we change from this life to the next. We continue to become ourselves. We move along the way toward becoming one with God. That’s the ultimate expression of life… becoming one with God – or maybe we should say it is *returning to our one-ness with God.* Jesus showed us the way. As we embrace our spiritual nature so that it becomes the fullest expression of who we are – the divinity that is within us is revealed. You know this dynamic is not fully explored in your life – and you care about this stuff. That’s why you’re here. Me, too.

Now and then we are subject to circumstances that can throw us off track. A season of poor health will do that. The loss of a dear one. The COVID wilderness did it. During the worst of COVID we so wanted *to go back to the way things were.*

Actually, that can’t happen, because of Covid or anything else, we can’t go *back* to anything. We can’t go back from where we are to some place or time or dynamic of the past. That’s not how life works – it’s a wishful sentiment. It expresses our longing for the comfort of what we knew and the insecurity we feel about the future.

Yet we only go forward. That is how God created life. The good news is that God goes with us - and that is never backward. We become. We continue to *become.* Should we flirt with the notion that we can go back to something, we are working against the principles of God. Moses learned about this when he encountered the burning bush. He asked for God’s name. God told him… *I am.*  Not *I was*, not *I will be*… just, *I am.*

This discovering the fullness of who we are is a funny business. Some folks attribute it to luck.

**Gary Player** is a professional golfer. He is retired now. Golfers consider him one of the greats to have played the game. He hit, what many considered to be, a lot of lucky shots. He once famously said,

*The more I practice, the luckier I get.*

He had talent. He added hard work. He became a great golfer. He is still learning to be himself.

We have responsibility in becoming … our own amazing creation of God.

Here are two people with similar abilities, but their choices took them very different directions.

**Bernie Madoff** had an investment group – he invited individuals, other investment groups, and pension funds to invest with him. He took their money, billions of dollars, and paid a good interest rate back.

Bernie managed billions of dollars. He did this for years – he was handed massive amounts of people’s money. He also bought vacation homes, lived lavishly, made loans of tens of millions of dollars to his children, and continued taking money from investors to keep it all going. He was amazing!

Then Bernie was convicted for the largest financial fraud in American history. *He was not investing people’s money, he was spending it.* He marketed his method by calling it, "too complicated for outsiders to understand." Prosecutors estimated the size of the fraud to be $65 billion dollars.

He was responsible for incredible losses by non-profit organizations, the life savings of thousands of people, and a huge loss of pension funds for an even larger number of elderly people.

He was amazingly himself … but tragically irresponsible.

Then there was **John Templeton**

He was born in Kentucky. He paid his college tuition from winnings at the poker table. He had a storied career in investment. During the depression of the 1930’s he bought 100 shares of every stock listed on the New York Stock Exchange. When the U.S. economy took off again with the manufacturing demands of World War II – Templeton’s assets took off, too. He developed the Templeton Group of Mutual Funds - which managed 25 billion dollars of assets.

He was a winner on the surface. But then he became amazingly, responsibly, himself.

John Templeton became one of the most generous philanthropists in history, giving away over a billion dollars to charitable causes – that’s a billion dollars 40 years ago. He was knighted by the British for his philanthropic work. He said, *real wealth is spiritual*. He was a Christian man.

He created the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, an award of 1.2 million dollars each year. The amount of the prize was more than the Nobel Prize, because Templeton believed that progress in religion is the most important goal of humanity.

Then Sir John retired to the Bahamas and swam in the Atlantic Ocean in front of his beachfront office every day until he died at age 95. He was amazingly himself.

Here’s the thing about you.

The best thing you can be is amazingly yourself. Fully actualized… no need to portray your amazing self as anyone or anything other than who you are. No need to hide… no need to brag… The best thing you can be is yourself – everyone else is already taken.

But it doesn’t just happen. Age helps, but it won’t do the job by itself. *You* have to do it. *You* have to want it. *You* have to choose it. Psychologist Barbara Sher says, *get started… it’s only too late if you don’t start now!* And do it responsibly.

**Jill Kinmont Booth** died ten years ago. She was 75 years old. Most of her life she had been a special education teacher. She was special, herself.

She had been a skier, the national women’s slalom champion. She was on the cover of Sports Illustrated in 1955 when she raced in Utah for an Olympic berth. As she sped down the mountain she hit an icy spot, lost control, crashed, and hit a tree. Her neck was broken and she was paralyzed below her shoulders. She was 18 years old.

She became a different kind of champion. She was the subject of a book and two feature films, she became a teacher who refused to let her injury turn her into a victim.

After graduating from UCLA she applied to its school of education and was rejected because of her disability. Undaunted she moved to the University of Washington and taught remedial reading in elementary schools.

In a newspaper article written in 1968 Jill Kinmont Booth said that a Los Angeles school district physician kept saying, *What a tragedy. A young girl, cut down in the bloom of youth.* She said, *It sounded like a Western or something.*

Booth said to the physician, *That’s nothing. The only tragedy is if you won’t hire me because of this injury.*

She taught in Beverly Hills and then in the Bishop School District for the rest of her professional life.

You might find it challenging to understand yourself as “amazing.” You have been taught, warned, harangued, or wounded enough to stay a safe distance from a complete embrace of your remarkable self. Whatever the reason you hold back, you can move past your limitations. As you do that you are being what God intends and the fulness of meaning, satisfaction, and joy in your life becomes more vivid.

You’re a priceless child of God. You have a unique human experience of life. It’s a gift… and there is more for you ahead.

Now… one last story… I’ve told it before… I’ll tell it at least twice a year every year because it takes awhile for it to believe it.

It’s called **the Angel of the Archives**.

It is a story I tell often, because the truth of it helps when we are trying to move forward.

So… up in heaven in the throne room where the ‘old man’ (that’s what we affectionately call God) with his long white beard sits on his throne; Jesus is seated on his right side; there is a small chair on God’s left. And in it sits the angel of the archives.

Whenever a person is faced with a big moment in life, and prays for God to give them guidance, God turns to the angel of the archives.

The angel then scurries over to the nearby door and steps into a room that is tall and narrow. There are slots built into the walls that go 20 feet into the air, and in each of the slots is a set of blueprints. There is a ladder on wheels that the angel of the archives can push around the walls and climb up to reach into the right slot for the necessary set of blueprints, and then scurry down to open them up and find where, in the blueprint of life, the person is and whether – according to the blueprints of their life - they are headed toward the right or the wrong way…

*Except that it doesn’t exist.*

There is no throne room.

There are no blueprints for your life.

There is no angel of the archives.

I love that story.

You are free to choose. God made you… free to choose… free to become God’s gift of all that you can become.

That’s the responsibility of being amazingly you!