

GOING ACROSS TO THE OTHER SIDE

Mark 4:35-41

The American Dream is the ideal that the government should protect each person's opportunity to pursue their own idea of happiness. This has expanded to cover the rights of minorities and women, help provide housing, and assist veterans. Others hope for the opportunity to go to college, save for retirement, own a home, provide health insurance for all children, encourage business growth, and afford prosperity.

That idea expanded into the desire for greater and greater material benefits. This change was described in the F. Scott Fitzgerald novel, *The Great Gatsby*. In it, the character Daisy Buchanan cries when she sees Jay Gatsby's shirts, because she's "never seen such—such beautiful shirts before."

Today maybe the American dream is less ambitious. One writer has said:

"The vaunted American dream, the idea that life will get better, that progress is inevitable if we obey the rules and work hard, that material prosperity is assured, has been replaced by a hard and bitter truth. The American dream, we now know, is a lie. We will all be sacrificed. The virus of corporate abuse - the perverted belief that only [corporate profit](#) matters - has spread to [outsource our jobs](#), cut the budgets of our schools, close our libraries, and plague our communities with foreclosures and unemployment."

Perhaps things aren't that bad. Maybe the dream is more that I can live in a comfortable house, afford health coverage, go on good vacations, and retire in comfort. Studies show that the happiest people in the world live in Denmark where their lives are

simpler and less materialistic, but quieter and more comfortable.

For so many of us life is about being comfortable, about being satisfied with what we have and where we are. The disciples of Jesus feel that way in our lesson. They are quite busy working with Jesus to help all the people who have been coming to Him for healing and His teaching. They are in Capernaum, home town to many of them, and a town big and prominent enough to handle the crowds coming to Jesus. But then Jesus gives this command, "Let us go across to the other side." This not only means that they will be leaving their home area and the routine they have, it also means that they are going to a very different place along the Sea of Galilee. It is going into a place they fear.

We see the fear of the disciples when the storm comes. The Sea of Galilee is no sea. It is about the size of Lake Minnetonka up north, which makes it a good size lake. And it is the lowest fresh water lake on earth at about 600 feet below sea level and surrounded by hills up to 2,500 above sea level. The result is that downdrafts can cause quick, violent storms. But Jesus' disciples are fishermen who live off the lake. Their fear is not just from the storm, but what they think is causing it. On the other side is Gerasa. If we read in the next chapter of Mark the disciples land on that other side and encounter a man who is possessed by so many demons that he is named "Legion." Because of those demons no one has been strong enough to keep him in control even with chains. The disciples are not surprised by this. They expect this of a place like Gerasa where people are pagan and not devout Jews like in Capernaum. And they believe that in the depths of the lake over 150 feet down is the gate to the underworld where the devil lives. No wonder they didn't want to cross over to the other side!

Jesus calls us to go over to the other side. It would be easy to just care for our own families and our own small corner of the universe, but Jesus doesn't let us sit comfortably. He is the one who says, "Let your light so shine that people may see your good deeds and give glory to God," and "Love your enemies' pray for those who persecute you." When He showed that loving a neighbor is like the story of the Good Samaritan, He said, "Go and do likewise." We may feel we are busy; we may think we have enough on our platter, but still He calls to us, "Let us go to the other side."

A baby feels safe and comfortable in her mother's womb. It is warm and soft and protected. That's why a baby cries when she is born. She wants to just stay there, but if she does, she dies. She has to "cross over to the other side" out into the world.

We too need to cross over to the other side. I am talking about how our lives do not end in this world. We will be raised on the last day to "cross over" either to joy or suffering. But I am also talking about how we "cross over" now into a new life with Christ, and finally I am talking about how we "cross over" with Jesus as He takes us into a life of following Him.

The "American Dream" is not the hope Jesus calls us to. Our object is not to be comfortable and satisfied with this life, but to live in anticipation of the next life. Otherwise we are satisfied with a world in which kids get gunned down in schools, women are raped by those they trust, and the elderly are abandoned. If we are comfortable in this life, who cares about the next? That is why God raised Jesus from the dead, so we could look to our next life when He comes again, so we too can cross over from death into life.

That is what happened because Jesus did "cross over" for us. He left His place in heaven to "cross over" into a life as a human with all the affects sin causes in our lives—sickness, hunger, anxiety, fear, pain. Then He "crossed over" by not

limiting His message to just people who supported Him, to those like Him. And He "crossed over" into a ministry that took Him away from all security by going to the cross for us. That is where He took our sin—our refusal to make God our priority, not our comfort—and nailed them there so we can have a new life—a life that crossing us over from sin into faith in Him.

Because Jesus has called us to "cross over" into a new life with Him, we hear His daily call to "cross over" into what does not feel safe and easy. For some like Carl and Kelsey Grulke it means literally crossing over to the other side of the world to work for Lutheran Bible Translators in Botswana. For former student Pastor Jon Clausing, who will visit us next month, it meant taking his family also to Africa. For Judy Newhouse it meant first going to Hong Kong for five years and now working here as our coordinator of International Student Ministry. But for any of us it can be as simple as going across to the other side of a room to greet a person we do not know. Jesus "crossed over" to get into our lives. Now we can follow Him as we "cross over" into the lives of people in our world.

Sermon delivered by Pastor Mark T. Heilman
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