



# SAINT MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*A Proper 16, Isaiah 51:1-6, Matthew 16:13-20  
St. Mark's, Little Rock, 8-27-17  
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The last time I played football was in Junior High  
And while I do remember a couple of big games,  
what I mostly recall were the practices--  
especially those hot, August  
two a day practices--  
one early in the morning,  
the other late in the afternoon.

I was a lineman,  
and at times played both offense and defense.  
And so most of what I learned  
was really basic stuff--  
blocking and tackling  
learning to fire off the line  
as fast as I could  
and with as much power as we could muster,  
and through relentless workouts  
some days driving the sled forward  
until our calves burned  
over time  
our stamina increased.

Our coach was inspiring  
-especially with his challenges.  
He told us more than once  
that even though we had a fine quarterback  
and equally talented running backs,

the game would be won or lost at the line of scrimmage.  
Without good blocking and tackling  
he said  
as a team  
we could do nothing.  
And he was right  
And to be a part of a team  
was thrilling

Several years ago  
when I first showed our vision and mission statement  
to one of our vestry members,  
I explained to him that it was pretty basic stuff--  
In fact,  
its on your bookmark in your bulletin today  
and its really the basics of discipleship,  
--things like teaching people how to pray,  
learning about the bible, the sacraments  
how we serve God, how we can love others  
working for justice and peace in the world.

When I shared that vision with the vestry member  
his response at the time surprised me  
He said,  
“Sounds like blocking and tackling.”

Looking back  
I believe he was right.  
And so as we begin another year  
I invite you to think about where you are in life  
And ask yourself  
Are you where you want to be  
And then take a good  
at this vision and mission.

Because in its essence  
its about discipleship  
About patterning  
your life after Jesus  
And walking with Christ  
every day.

It begins

we seek to become a vibrant community of people  
who worship weekly.

When Moses came down from Mt. Sinai

with the Ten Commandments,

Now that the people

had been delivered from slavery in Egypt

He came with God's teaching

about how they could remain free.

And an essential part of that

was to set aside one day in seven

for God

a day not to work

But rather to rest

And a day especially to

To learn about God

And to Worship God.

Even the animals were to get a regular Sabbath day

Jesus himself made his practice

to worship every Sabbath with a community of people.

Not once a month

but every week.

If Jesus needed to worship weekly

What does that say about us?

Twenty five years ago

long before we had cell phones

And the phrase 24/7 didn't even exist

the late Henri Nouwen

Said this "It requires an enormous effort

to be

and to stay in the world

with its many demands

while keeping our hearts and minds

solidly anchored in God."

Today its not Egypt

Who threatens us with slavery

and a return to bondage

I believe it is us

Its our saying yes

to a 1000 things on the Sabbath

instead of saying yes to God.

The commandment to remember the Sabbath  
and to keep it holy or set apart for God  
is really God's gift to us  
It's a way to anchor our lives in Christ  
So that every week  
you leave this place  
With a peace, power  
purpose for your life  
and hope for the world  
that only God can give

And so I am not ashamed to invite to rededicate yourself  
Yourselves to obeying commandments  
And so wherever you are on Sunday  
If there is any way possible be here  
or somewhere for worship  
and then rest.

Pray daily  
Prayer is at its most basic  
Is the intentional  
Regular practice  
of making a space for God in our lives.

Henri Nouwen in his book on *Spiritual Formation*  
calls prayer "wasting time with God."

Prayer is being unbusy with God  
instead of being busy with other things.

Nouwen says  
And what do you do  
once you have set aside a time and a place  
to be alone with God?  
Just be with Jesus. He says.

A friend in a men's group said this week  
Imagine how you would feel  
If your child or your grandchild  
Called you up  
And said Pops

What you are doing today?  
I'd like to come over and hang out with you for a while.  
Can you imagine how that would make you feel?

Imagine how God must feel  
when we want to hang out with God  
and what your life would be like  
if you did that regularly?

Learn constantly  
St Paul in today's lesson  
encourages us to  
Be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

In the great commandment  
Jesus says that we love God  
not only with our hearts and our strength,  
but also with all our mind.

Psalm 1  
says those who study God's teaching  
are like trees planted by streams of water  
bearing fruit.

I remember twenty years ago in the Holy Land  
seeing a lot of desert  
many places  
where it is always tan

But along the Jordan River  
it was  
trees were alive  
flowers blooming.  
Our lives can be like this  
As we practice  
Learning about God  
And God's creation.

Right now at this church  
there are about to be more ways to learn about God  
and God's teaching than before.

Education for Ministry, Catechumenate, Bible studies,  
Sunday School, Book studies like Listening For God  
Accidental Saints  
And

How Not to be your child's ATM  
The opportunities are many  
but only you can make the commitment.  
And as parents,  
only you can make faith a priority for your children

And the best way to do that  
show up yourself.

Your life may be the most important gospel  
that your child ever read.

Serving joyfully.

Jesus told us this  
the leaders of this world  
will lord it over you

But I am among you as one who serves

The night before he died

Jesus got down on his knees  
And began to wash the disciples feet.  
Time and again he said  
if you hold on to your life\  
the exact opposite happens  
you lose it.

But when you give it away  
That's when you find it.

Your main ministry

Will always be the things that you do every day  
as you live your life.  
in your home  
in your job  
In your relationships

But today

I invite you also pick at least ministry at St. Mark's  
one way to serve here.

The church true enough is a volunteer organization  
and can do nothing without people

but just as important  
if you don't get involved in at least one ministry here  
you may never get to know  
some of the wonderful people here  
and the power found in community.

Because among the people of this church

I personally have experienced a goodness  
and a love here among the people here  
that's not found everywhere in this world.

Get involved

Consider something like Stephen Ministry  
And the world will a little bit better  
because of you .

Live generously

I'm not to going say much about this today  
Because the whole month of October  
We will focus holistically  
on living generous lives.

We' ll hear about

living generously through gratitude  
living generously through time  
through forgiveness  
through proportional giving  
and through service,

so we'll save these for October

but I would remiss today  
if left you with the idea  
that discipleship is just about five things  
worship weekly  
pray daily  
learn constantly  
serve joyfully  
and live generously

Because when Jesus calls a man a woman or a child  
to follow me

And I do believe he is calling you,  
He is not just calling you to be a disciple  
To do this these things

Even more he is calling you to the greatest adventure of your life  
To live in the Kingdom of God.

A life into the unknown  
And which embraces  
the very vision of God  
risks to be sure  
But also with surprises  
And sometimes unspeakable joy.

Some examples

A few years ago in Fort Smith  
A widow and a retired doctor  
Dreamed about a volunteer medical clinic  
for the working poor.  
I was skeptical.  
I thought, No Way.

But it happened  
And to this day  
thousands are getting care.

Another man  
wounded by one church  
came to the Episcopal looking for healing  
in the process he healed others.TV  
He dreamed of helping the poor find honest work  
He started with a popcorn machine  
TV, and DVD player

Within five years  
There were job counselors, social workers  
and people getting another chance at life.

If you had me two years ago  
If St. Mark's would have a food pantry  
And last month feed more families  
than every before  
I'm not sure I would have believed it.  
But it did  
we did.

And just this week one of you shared your dream  
Of having evening prayer here  
every day here at 530p  
there was time I wouldn't have believed that dream either  
But I do now

because God is God full of surprises  
And Jesus call to follow him as a disciples  
Is nothing  
if not a great adventure  
full of surprises.

So I say to you  
listen to him  
and listen for his call to follow him

Because after these practices of discipleship  
Blocking, tackling  
sometimes two a day  
and sometimes more challenging  
than the August heat

Don't be surprised  
When you are on the goal line  
expecting God to call run  
but instead God calls a pass  
And throws it  
to you.