

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lately at my house John, Benjamin, and I have been watching different Disney films. One of these films is Finding Nemo. It is one of Ben's favorites and if I had to pick a movie to watch over and over again this would be one of them. In this film, Nemo's dad, Marlin is a bit overprotective of his son. Marlin nervously takes Nemo to his first day of school and he seems to do okay until he learns that Nemo is headed for the drop off. Marlin fears the worst for his son – he wants Nemo to stay where he is safe.

I think we all can be a like Marlin from time to time. We worry about our family and friends and we worry about ourselves. We are creatures of habit and we like to stay where we are comfortable or feel safe. Peter demonstrates this to us. He wants to stay on the mountain. He desperately wishes to build three tents – one for Jesus, one for Elijah, and one for Moses. Peter's desire to stay was overcome by fear when God told the disciples to listen to Jesus.

I think it's safe to assume that we all want those warm fuzzy feelings over the uncomfortable ones. Life seems to be easier when we can just stay with the same routines, the same creature comforts, and our circle of family and friends. We tend not to like an unknown future.

Just before the transfiguration passage in Matthew, Jesus begins to show his disciples that he needs to go to Jerusalem. He begins to prepare them that he will suffer and die. And of course, Peter didn't want this to happen. He didn't want to hear or think about Jesus being hurt let alone killed.

Peter had an inkling of the future. Maybe he wanted to stay on the mountain to avoid God's plan that he didn't understand. Now that Jesus revealed himself to Peter, James, and John, Peter wanted to stay in this safe and comforting place. Whatever Peter's reason for wanting to stay, the persuasion from heaven and Jesus' words of "Get up and do not be afraid" eventually led Peter, James, and John back down the mountain.

How often do we want to stay on the mountain? How often do we want to stay with the familiar and not be uncomfortable?

A little over nine years ago, I met with my candidacy committee for the first time. During that initial conversation I was asked where I thought God was calling me to serve – was it a large congregation in the city or a small rural congregation or something in between. My response was that I wanted to serve a small congregation in Pennsylvania. I didn't want to be anywhere near Baltimore or DC.

I didn't want to leave the familiar. Even though I didn't want to leave the mountain per se, and was led to both places throughout my seminary education and first call that I told my candidacy committee that I didn't want to go, I'm glad that God led me to these places. I can't imagine doing ministry anywhere else, especially in a small congregation in Pennsylvania.

God challenges us to leave the mountain. God calls us to be disciples. He calls us to seek justice and peace, and to serve the poor. God asks us to do hard things. They are difficult for a variety

of reasons. One is because what God asks is usually the opposite of the accepted norm of society. Another is that it is difficult because risks are involved. We might risk our friendships by disagreeing with someone because of our faith. Or we might be rejected by some because of what we believe. Finally – I think what makes ministry messy and hard is that we have to leave the mountain. We have to leave the familiar and safe. When we share God’s love with others through different ministries we are vulnerable.

Knowing that God’s work can be messy and difficult is only one side. In the midst of the messiness of ministry it is also very rewarding. Jesus is behind us when we leave our mountain saying don’t be afraid. It doesn’t mean things are going to be easy.

Last year at our leadership retreats we talked a lot about becoming a discipleship church. This year we are fleshing that reality out here at Saint Nicholas. There may be things we do differently as the year progresses. It may feel a little uncomfortable to step off of the mountain and try a new process.

Don’t be afraid – leave the mountain. Do ministry – be changed as God speaks and guides us in his work in the world.

Marlin left the reef to save Nemo. He had a wild adventure, but was changed through the process.

We too, can have a life changing adventure in our journey with God. We can be bold and step outside the safe and the familiar. We can come down the mountain and follow God’s call.

God may lead us in directions we may not anticipate, but as he does his love is shared with others as he whispers “Do not be afraid” to each of us when we leave the safe and familiar.

Do not be afraid to leave the mountain. Peter left the mountain and followed Christ. We can do the same.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.