



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

December 13, 2020

Enjoy the Journey

Dr. Bruce Lancaster

Enjoy the Journey

Dr. Bruce Lancaster

© 2020 by Dr. Bruce Lancaster and Westminster Presbyterian Church.

All rights reserved.

No part of this sermon may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author.

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: December 11, 2020

Genesis 12:1-3
Matthew 28:16-20

My wife and I were taking a vacation in San Francisco during my first interim ministry. We were taking the iconic photograph from Battery Spencer across the bay, the Golden Gate Bridge and San Francisco in the background.

We asked a young man to take the picture and as he handed the camera back to us, he said in a soft California voice, “Enjoy the journey.”

Ever since then, that has been my theme for the interim ministry: Enjoy the Journey.

It has a biblical foundation. The scripture passages we hear are stories of journeys: spiritual and geographical, personal, all about mission and change.

Abraham had no clue what God would do with his life. All he knew was that God was one step ahead of him and he had to go from home to God only knows where!

God is always calling his followers to journey out, in fact, it is no accident that there are so many stories in the Bible about people making a journey because it is, in fact Abraham, who is the pattern for their faith and our faith.

This faith of Abraham, by which he said, “Yes, I will follow,” is the pattern of faith which God gives to you and me today so that our names can be joined not only with Abraham, but with Moses and Joshua and the disciples and Paul.

It is the faith of Mary and Joseph as they made their journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, from Bethlehem to Egypt and back.

It is the gospel, as Jesus tells the disciples: “Go into all the world, and I will be with you until the end of the age.” That promise by Jesus is the source of what means to enjoy | the journey!

We’ve been on that journey. I’ve heard the questions along the way, and I imagine Abraham asked them, the disciples asked it; it’s the question of all children on the journey: Your children, my children, God’s children: How Much Longer? Are We There Yet?

Well, you’re almost there; and my part of the journey with you is over: I have enjoyed the journey, let me say it again, with all the twists and turns and ups and down, I have enjoyed the journey!

I hope you have...and what I want to say now is all about the journey you will be making with Jo Forrest.

The best question I was ever asked when I was a candidate like Jo was for Westminster, and I rephrase it for you because I think it’s the right question for you so that you and she will enjoy the journey.

What does a minister need from the members of this church in order to be effective as your pastor, so that you all ‘enjoy the journey....’?

I will start with the Book of Order. As part of the Minister's Installation Service, the congregation will be asked to answer in the affirmative the following questions:

- Do we, the members of the church, accept Jo Forrest as our pastor, chosen by God through the voice of this congregation to guide us in the way of Jesus Christ?
- Do we agree to encourage her, to respect her decisions, and to follow as she guides us, serving Jesus Christ, who alone is Head of the Church?
- Do we promise to pay her fairly and provide for her welfare as she works among us; to stand by her in trouble and share her joys? Will we listen to the word she preaches, welcome her pastoral care, and honor her authority as she seeks to honor and obey Jesus Christ our Lord?

If Jo Forrest is to have an effective ministry with you, for you to enjoy the journey with her, you will need to follow through on the answers to these questions. That's the short answer!

The long answer comes in the day-after-day, month-after-month of life together. I think of it in terms of 4 H's – Human, Honesty, Humility, and Humor.

These are marks of ministry that I've gleaned over the last forty-two years of my own journey through ministry with so many churches and so many wonderful people like you.

First, being human. When I was a young boy and our little church went to our Presbytery camp in North Louisiana for our annual church family fun afternoon and picnic supper, there was a softball game.

I was in the fifth or sixth grade. Bill Hatcher was the pitcher. Bill Hatcher was our minister, my minister when I joined the church and the Executive Presbyter of the presbytery for the church when I was ordained and began my ministry. The stole I wear today was his stole, given to me by his wife when he died; and I wear it today in honor of him.

Well, as I strutted to the batter's box, I was thinking, "What does a preacher know about baseball?" I mean, what does a preacher know about anything that has to do with real life?

Well, I learned what Bill Hatcher knew about real life; he threw overhand, after all, I played Little League! He struck me out! He was more than a preacher; he could play baseball like a real person.

He was human!

Jo was chosen to lead because of who she is and because of who you are, children of God; as Dr. Seuss put it: "Today you are you, yes that is true; there is no one alive who is youer than you."

I've read that one reason so many young people are leaving the church is because they say they can't find real people to lead them into a real faith.

Because we believe in a real God, you need to allow Jo to lead you into a real faith for your real life through her real life that comes through her humanity.

Secondly, be honest with each other. This is a matter of openness and vulnerability.

You need to tell each other what's on your mind, but you will also need to listen honestly to each other; that is, I want you to listen to the minister, and she will work extra hard to listen to you.

That, to me, is the foundation of an honest relationship, a friendship built on respect and love. It means getting to know each other, taking the time to build a friendship.

How does it happen? By calling Jo Forrest as your pastor, you have already invited her into your lives.

But it's the personal, one-on-one invitation that is necessary to make that honest relationship, that kind of friendship come alive.

I cannot stress enough the need for friendship. You take the first steps...coming into the school cafeteria, invite her to sit with you....work hard to invite her to get know you.

Let her get to know you as you work hard to get to know her. Begin with an honest relationship

The third part of this relationship is a matter of ‘humility’.

Humility allows us to enjoy each other’s company as the forgiven sinners we are, that is, being honest about our shared humanity.

Because if you’re honest with each other, you will find that you don’t have to kid yourselves about who you are or hide yourselves from each other.

It’s what one pastoral mentor told me as I went into the parish, “Bruce, you’re not as bad as some people will tell you, but then, you’re not as great as you or others will think.”

Humility is that point of accepting that we do let each other down, but we’re here to pick each other up and carry on.

It means that if a congregation is to stand by a pastor and share her troubles and joys, then she has to let the members know what those troubles and joys are.

And the members of the congregation have to do the same for the pastor.

Humility is knowing that we’re not in this by ourselves, but we are in it together with God.

So, you see, humility builds on the honest relationship we have.

Finally, what the new pastor will need from members of the congregation in order to be effective is a healthy sense of humor.

You know how I like to laugh at myself and with others.

As I've tried to be honest with God and humble before God, I've come to believe that God has tremendous sense of humor; I see this every time I look in the mirror!

I think it's what's at stake in the answer to the first question of the Shorter Catechism: "What is the chief end of humans? To glorify and enjoy God forever."

A sense of humor allows us to enjoy God...a sense of humor is how we enjoy God. It means that we don't take ourselves so seriously as to believe that God couldn't do it without us.

It does mean that we take God seriously enough to believe that God wants to do it with us.

That's the fun part, the enjoyable side. That's what your minister will need from the members of this congregation: The pure pleasure and joy of being together because God loves all of us.

Human, Honesty, Humility, Humor...as God said to Abraham and the disciples, to so many others in the story of faith and as God says to you and me:

"Come on. Follow me. I can't tell you exactly where we're going; but trust me to lead you there, and you will live a life which in every way is a celebration of faith."

May God help us each one to pick up our bags and go!

Enjoy the journey!

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2040 Washington Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15241
412-835-6630

www.westminster-church.org