



On the Cusp of Adventure

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Acts 1:12-14

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We are all on the great adventure for which God created us. It's an adventure that is at times challenging, exhilarating, and perhaps even terrifying! Last week we asked the question, "Who is the Lord of your adventure?" Jesus often taught his disciples when they were on a boat and we saw that the ultimate adventure isn't about the boat but about Jesus, the Lord we know and trust. Life is actually a series of adventures and every day we are on the cusp of some new adventure!

Last Wednesday, I was driving home from the dentist when the traffic suddenly slowed way down. As we crept along, I realized it was because of a blockage around a gas station where cars were practically piled on top of each other. "That's a bit weird," I thought driving by and then remembered Ann Marie had said something about, "Did you want to get gas?" I hadn't paid any attention to the news, so I'd said to her, "We are okay." I went home and checked the local TV station and there was the news of the gas shortage. That's when I realized we needed gas for an out-of-town trip the next day! So, I headed for a gas station, thinking, "Well, Lord, this is the cusp of adventure!"

I drove to four gas stations before finding one with gas and long lines. I got in line and as I finally neared the pumps, I saw someone tip the young person working for the gas

station helping cars line up. I thought, “That’s a good idea,” and reached for my wallet. No wallet! I’d rushed out without it! I thought, “Oh, Lord, now you are grinning watching me on this adventure.” I go home, get the wallet, get back in line and by the mercy of God, got gas! Adventure!

The word *cusp* is an interesting word. Cusp means an inflection point where something changes, where one adventure shifts to another adventure. A cusp is a point of transition. A cusp is that fragile moment before something new happens. It can be a scary and exciting moment as you anticipate that which you can’t really know in advance. Over a year ago I read of the spreading virus in Wuhan. It was clear we were on a cusp, but of exactly what we had no idea. I recently watched some surfers in the Pacific Ocean time it perfectly to catch the crest of a wave. They were on the crest of adventure, that is, on the cusp of adventure. When God called Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you,” Abram was on the cusp of adventure – and so are you and so am I!

There is a roller coaster park in Pittsburgh that is famous for its old-style wooden roller coasters that have a wonderful way of racing up and down and side to side while you hold your hands in the air, happily screaming away. When they installed their first steel coaster known as the Steel Phantom,

I was eager to try it out. As I stepped into the second car of that coaster for the first time and looked up, I realized the first move of the coaster cars was virtually straight up for a long, long way! We reached the top and the coaster stopped in a brief hesitation. Most of the cars were still looking up as they hadn't reached the crest of the track, but the second car was flat, horizontal which meant we couldn't see where we were going, although the only option was down. That brief, hesitant wait was the cusp – the moment of transition – the edge of adventure – when you are both nervous and excited. Of course, on the Steel Phantom, with its straight down drop and double barrel, you quickly forgot about everything except screaming!

The Book of Acts picks right up where the Gospel according to Luke ends. Jesus is raised from the dead and is about to deploy his disciples and ascend to God. He gives his great charge: “[B]ut you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Talk about being on the cusp, on the cusp of adventure. Jesus has told them that there is a new adventure coming, the receiving of the Holy Spirit, and their mission to speak of Jesus everywhere. They know enough to know they are on the tip of adventure, the edge, the brink of adventure, the cusp of adventure. Yet, they have no idea

what that adventure will really entail, in all its exciting and its terrifying aspects. You and I are on the cusp of adventure, too!

The pandemic is receding. There are new freedoms from the CDC! We are on the cusp of figuring out what kind of life we want to live now. We have a wonderful new pastor coming. I talked with Hope Lee last week. She has such a great spirit. We are on the cusp of a great adventure as a congregation. Every one of us is on the cusp of some new day and who knows what adventure that new day will bring. Next Saturday is the Global 6K Walk for Water. 800 million people around the world do not have clean water. We can raise money to help these dear people, in fact so far VPC has donated over \$21,000, third in the nation! I'll be walking and you can walk and/ or you can donate, too! Any donations starting tomorrow morning totaling up to \$200,000 will be doubled by a generous donor. The ushers have flyers with the information about it. With just a week to go, we are on the cusp of adventure for those who need water!

So, as we follow the adventure of the disciple-learners of Jesus, Jesus has told them that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit was going to come upon them and they would be his witnesses. We read, "And when Jesus had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a

cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?” (Acts 1:9-11) I think that is one of the great moments of understated humor in the Bible. When’s the last time you saw someone physically rise in the air and disappear in a cloud?

“Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away [a little over a half-a-mile]. And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room [the same upper room where Jesus hosted the last supper before his betrayal], where they were staying [interestingly, it wasn’t just a meeting room, they were living in that room], Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James [that’s all 11 eleven apostle-disciples since Judas Iscariot was gone]. All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (Acts 1:12-14).

It’s this last sentence that grabs my attention. Jesus told his small band of followers that the Holy Spirit was going to come upon them and they would be his witnesses. They knew holy adventure was coming but they had no idea what

it was. When you are on the cusp of adventure, when you know something is going to happen and you don't know if it will be challenging, exhilarating, or terrifying, what do you do? I will tell you what the eleven apostles and various women including Jesus's mother and the brothers of Jesus were doing – they were praying and they were praying like crazy! They were devoting themselves to prayer.

What does it mean they *devoted* themselves? When I left for my freshman year at Georgia Tech, I left behind my unhappy nine-year-old brother. When the Christmas break arrived, I rode the train home from Atlanta to the train station in Alexandria and then caught a taxi to our home in north Arlington. Walking in the front door, I yelled, "I'm home!" Immediately, I heard footsteps running downstairs and bounding up the stairs and zooming into view raced my nine-year-old brother, who executed a perfect flying tackle, landing on the floor with both arms wrapped around my right leg. I said, "Hi." No response, he just lay there, holding to me tightly. Up came Mom and Dad, a handshake from Dad, a hug from Mom. Then my two sisters made their appearance. We said, "Hi." Then everybody went back to what they were doing – everyone but my brother.

"Okay, you can let go. I am ready to go to our room now." He didn't let go and so I picked up my suitcase and

dragging a nine-year-old, I shuffled through the entry way, down the stairs and to our room. Wherever I was for the next two weeks, there was my brother with me. Whatever the word devoted means, that's devoted! Today he calls me his "brother brother." Brother in the flesh. Brother in the Lord. I love him dearly. His arms tightly grabbing my leg is what the concept of "devoted" is all about. So, the disciples were devoting themselves to prayer. The word in this context means "constantly continuing with intense effort." Prayer isn't easy, our minds and bodies are easily distracted, but they prayed and kept on praying.

What do you think they were praying for? What were they asking God to do? The Bible doesn't tell us but we do know that they had been given a glimpse of the majesty and power of God with the resurrection of Jesus and watching the ascension of Jesus into the sky. I can only imagine that whatever they were asking God to do, it wasn't a small ask. "Lord, prepare us for the adventure, renew our hearts, our minds, our wills. Cleanse us from personal sin and darkness. Attune us to your holy calling. Please touch people through us. Touch Jerusalem through us, touch Judea and Samaria through us, touch the whole world through us."

Last week we suggested the first question for the adventure God calls you on is, "Who is the Lord of the

adventure?” We answered, Jesus is our Lord, the one we draw near to and trust in the adventure. Now the second question for we who are all on the cusp of the adventure for which God created us, “What are you asking God to do?” Are you asking God to do anything? Are you praying prayers that appeal to the majesty and might of the awesome God who calls you? Our prayers are easily too small or too absent. But your God is not small. Are you praying for those who suffer from the coronavirus in the US, in Brazil, in India, in many places? Are you praying that the coarsening of American conversation be replaced with civility? Are you praying that the children in your life grow in wisdom, stature, and favor with God as did Jesus growing up? This pandemic has been rough on so many loving congregations. Are you praying for the wider church? Are you praying for this church as we get ready for new adventure this fall? And what about your own life? Do you pray little bitty prayers or do you get it? The awesome almighty God is with you on the cusp of adventure so that, like the disciples in the Upper Room, you may pray with intensity for great things.

Fred Craddock tells one of my favorite stories, a story from his boyhood. Fred says, “One evening my Dad took me out of the house and said, ‘Let’s lie down in the backyard and chew a bit of tender grass, just looking up at the sky.’ ‘Okay, Dad.’ And my father said to me, ‘Son, how far can

you think?’ I said, ‘What? What do you mean?’ Dad said, ‘How far can you think?’ ‘Well, I don’t know what you mean.’ ‘Just think as far as you can think up toward the stars.’

“So I worked up my imagination, and I said, ‘I’m thinking...I’m thinking...I’m thinking.’ He said, ‘Think as far as you can think. Son, are you thinking as far as you can think?’ ‘Well, yes, Dad!’ He said, ‘Well, in your mind, take a hammer and a stake and drive down that stake out there as far as you can think... Have you driven down the stake?’ ‘Dad! Yes?!’ ‘That’s how far you can think?’ I said, ‘Yes, sir.’ He said, ‘Now what’s on the other side of your stake?’ I said, ‘Well, there’s more sky, Dad.’ He said, ‘Move. Your. Stake.’ And Dad and I spent the rest of the evening moving my stake out there. It was a crazy thing to do, [said Fred] but I will never thank him enough for doing it.”¹

How big is your God? Imagine how big God is, how vast, how powerful, how excellent, how holy, how loving and compassionate God is, and drive down a stake to mark in your mind how big you understand God to be, how immense you know the power and love of Jesus to be. Then, move your stake. And keep moving it. God is infinitely more marvelous than you imagine. You and I are on the cusp of

¹ Fred B. Craddock, Craddock Stories, (St. Louis: Chalice Press 2001), pp. 123-124

adventure, so, what are you asking God to do? Move your stake and pray with passion. Ask big things of God and trust the God who loves you as the adventure unfolds!