

Chasing the Wind of Ambition - Matthew 12-22-33

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When we are riding the wave in our careers, our personal lives and loves, we always want more. One might say the curse of the modern age is the simple four-letter word, MORE. It used to be only the rich who were consumed with wanting more, but now it permeates every "level" of society.

Similarly, when God is doing great things in our lives, we could so easily get puffed up and want greatness for ourselves. Many children of God have fallen prey to that. This goes way back before modern times.

King David had everything he needed, yet he wanted more. What he saw and liked, he wanted. He saw Uriah's wife, he liked her, he wanted her and then he took her. Throughout history Kings and Queens, Emperors, Captains of Industry and Heads of states seem to always want more.

From the text today, I want to look for that dynamic. Jesus and the disciples had fed thousands of people from 5 loaves and 2 fish, as we read last week. Imagine how they must have been feeling. They were pumped. They probably got on the boat feeling great, and perhaps they should!

Then Jesus asked them to go across the lake while he went up to a mountain to pray. Later, Jesus decided to join them. Their boat was being tossed about by a storm. But Jesus decided he would just walk on the water to join them. When he got near the boat, the disciples thought he was a ghost. Jesus, seeing their fear, shouted to them, "It's me, not a ghost." So good ol' Peter says, "Seeing it IS you Lord, make me walk to you on the water too."

We know what happens. He walks then becomes scared and starts to sink. Peter was a committed disciple of Jesus, even participating in the great work, but he wanted more. We see elsewhere that Peter was an ambitious guy - imagine walking on water!

When our ambition is to be better, do more, be greater, and it is not motivated by God's mission in the world or if it is not motivated by genuine interest in the good of others, that ambition sinks us. There is nothing wrong with ambition, if it is motivated by good. Peter was just pumped, basking in the glory of having participated in a miracle of the feeding. Why did he even need to walk on water? The feeding was to the benefit of all, and perhaps to authenticate the Messiahship of Jesus and credential his followers. But walking on water? Why? It was just about him! Then Jesus let him sink, really to tell him, "It is not about you, it is about me!" When we become egocentric, even about God's things, God will cut us down - and that is for our own good.

You and I need to honestly look at why we want to be great. Why do we want our children and loved ones, our church, our city, state or country to be great? Is it so that we can be puffed up for our own sakes or for the greater good. Is it at the expense of others, where we put them down or falsely elevate ourselves as supreme? We all get swept up in a quest for greatness. God wants that quest to be tied into fulfilling his mission in the world. Peter was rescued by Jesus. In fact, he had to be restored and rescued many times. Jesus did not douse out his fire, but guided it for the sake of the Gospel.

It's good to aspire to greatness. But if we are looking for greatness for the sake of greatness, it is like making footprints on the water. It is futile, "chasing after the wind," says the wisdom

writer in Ecclesiastics. We need to note that it is only by God's Grace that Peter was rescued and re-focused. Peter is always described as an ambitious leader. He didn't want the movement to die - that was from the beginning: Remember it was Peter who tried to persuade Jesus not to go to Jerusalem. It was Peter who said that he will not deny Jesus - maybe the others but not me! It was Peter who cut off the ear of a guard arresting Jesus. He had ambition. Some would say, but wasn't that for the sake of the Church? It's good to have ambition for the church and your role in the church - only if it's not egocentric. Be careful if it is, or Jesus would show you up like he did with Peter who denied Jesus three times and was then ashamed. Jesus let that happen - made that happen - to show him that it is not about him but about Jesus. After that, Peter became the one chosen to lead the church. He was the one who, on the Day of Pentecost preached the greatest sermon ever preached. Three thousand people joined the church that day! In fact they all had ambition as disciples. Jesus directs or redirects that ambition for the sake of the mission of God - that all men and women should be saved.

In your life, you've always had some ambition. Many of you wouldn't be here today if you didn't have ambition. Some of us had our ambitions thrust on us - perhaps by the church, but we too have to be careful of the ego. What is your ambition for God and God's church? We too can have our fiery ambitious spirits re-focused for the sake of the Gospel and be prevented from sinking into mindless ambition. God wants to show us that grace too, because He loves you! He will give you that ambition and make sure you keep it in check, even if it hurts when he changes our path when it gets to our heads. Let Jesus show you that same Grace. Amen. Would you let Him?