

Brave New World

Shepherd's Grace Church

March 2, 2014

Author's Note: Due to weather, we were not able to meet for worship on Sunday March 2. This is the message I would have delivered had we been together. As you read it, the music that would have been offered is I have Decided to Follow Jesus and Lord You have Come to the Lakeshore. In the first song one of the lyrics is "I have decided to follow Jesus no turning back, no turning back" In the second a lyric is "Now my boat's left on the shoreline behind me, with your help I will seek other shores." Both remind me of the choices we have to make in our world. These are not easy choices and it is my prayer that as you read this sermon you might find the inspiration to persevere!

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves.² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.³ Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.⁴ Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."⁵ While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear.⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid."⁸ And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." (Matt. 17: 1-9) (Also Read 2Peter 1: 16-21)

The title, *Brave New World*, is one I borrowed this morning. Most of you will know it as the title of the work by Aldous Huxley. Huxley's novel was published in 1932 and was intended as a novel about a negative or in this case, reverse utopia. Huxley wrote of genetically manipulated child birth, mechanized work force, sleep learning, psychological manipulation and many other maladies of a society that had become so dependent on technology it trusted paraphernalia more than people and greed more than God!

I chose this title in part to illustrate that while Huxley's vision is troubling, while it is unsettlingly reminiscent of many elements in our 21st century world, in reality it had nothing on the world to which Peter writes in his second letter this morning. If we were to read past the short passage presented this morning we would discover in Peter's epistle, evidence of people so perverted by lust, by greed by the guile of smooth talking advocates of a world other than that which is offered by Jesus Christ! We would discover that the *Brave New World* of the 20th century vision offered by Huxley was nothing more than a continuation of the beaten, battered, world of the 1st century.

As Peter writes to his *Brave New World*, he speaks to those who would choose differently from Jesus. He speaks to people who have heard the good news and are on the verge of rejecting it. Temptation to the promise of an easier life is at the heart of Peter's letter and he advocates against that temptation as

an eye witness to the fullness of God's promise high on a mountain in a place far removed from the business and bravado of the existing world.

Peter writes of a very different Utopia! He writes of a world where truth and justice replace lust and greed. He writes of a world where those far removed from the center of society have the same opportunities to respond to love and grace as those at the very center. In fact Peter writes remembering that he was one of those far removed from the centers of power. He was one of those with no voice and now he writes as a testament to change!

The *Brave New World* that Aldous Huxley writes of is a world that envisions technology and human manipulation as the norm...not only the norm but that which is desirable. In Huxley's new world, in Peter's first century world, power lies in the manipulation of people. Power is understood as that which yields a positive personal gain. Power is traded as a matter of personal favor and is something which can be bartered. In Huxley's world it is bought and sold by those with superior genetic make-up. In Peter's time, it is acquired by birth but then negotiated as a means of pursuing the limited wealth that is perceived available.

In Roman controlled Israel in the days of Peter, two percent of the people controlled 98 percent of the wealth. The remaining resources were fought over as a matter of survival. Those who had nothing were pushed away from the centers of society and were regarded not as nothing, but as something to be used for other people's personal gain! The key to understanding here is that they were regarded as something! They were not someone but something...objects to be treated as objects, less than human, less than significant!

Peter writes to his world to invite them to know there is an alternative. He writes to remind them that he is witness to an alternative. When Peter went up on that mountain, he says, he saw the alternative. Today, as we hear Peter's words we still seek that alternative. Today, in our *Brave New World* we find that in many parts of our world "Life is Cheap." In many parts of our world, abortion is routinely used as a means of birth control. In some parts of our world it is used as a means of gender selection, genetic selection, economic selection! Today in our world, we find economic gaps widening between those who have wealth and those who do not. Today in our world, power is routinely traded in order that those who have it can lobby to control even more of it!

As we enjoy the warmth and comfort of our homes this morning in our Western World culture, we should be mindful that if we have enough to eat today we are better off than 75% of the people in the world. If we have a dry place to sleep tonight we are better off than 90 percent of the people in the world. If we have an automobile to take us to places we desire to go, we are better off than 98% of the people in the world today. I won't even begin to get into our privilege ranking if we have television sets, refrigerators, electricity and running water. As we enjoy the comfort of our homes this morning, we are people of privilege...and yet we do not feel like people of privilege. There still seems to be something missing from our lives. What could be missing from our *Brave New World*? What else could we need?

Peter writes to our world today because our world has not changed significantly from his world! He writes to our world because our world has become the *Brave New World* imagined by Huxley. He writes

to our world because the disparities apparent in Peter's day and imagined in Huxley's utopia have become even more real in the world of the 21st century and Peter wants us to know there is an alternative. Peter wants us to know there is another choice!

Peter reminds us that he is an eye witness to that choice. He reminds us that he went up on that mountain and was present as that choice was revealed. He reminds us that in his presence the world was transfigured on that mountain, that as he saw Jesus revealed for who He really is, it became obvious that God has in mind a different world! God's *Brave New World* is very different from the world we live in and God's *Brave New World* comes to be in a very different way from the ways we are taught...the ways of manipulation and greed. God's *Brave New World* comes into existence not through manipulation and misogyny but through a freedom to choose! It is this freedom where God meets us on this Transfiguration Sunday. It is this freedom in which God invites us to begin our journey toward the cross! It is in this freedom that God offers us more! It is with this freedom that we meet Peter on the mountain this morning. As we prepare to make our journey to the cross, God wants us to know that we have a choice!

To respond fully to our choice we first need to be more fully informed. Matthew begins to tell the story of transfiguration by reminding us of something that happened 6 days earlier. The number 6 should be understood as significant here. In 6 days, God created the heavens and the earth. On the 6th day, God brought humanity into the creation and God looked at all God had created and saw that it was good. Six days earlier, Jesus was having a conversation with his disciples. He asked them, "Who am I?" Now, we could go down a rabbit trail here and invite memory of the Spirit that hovered above the face of the deep and the Word that proceeds from the mouth of God and remind one another that this Jesus who is asking is the same Word that was present in the beginning and was a part of all that is and has been created. I will not take you down that trail however. I will leave you to ponder on your own the authenticity and power of the one who is asking the question!

"Who am I?" Jesus asks. The disciples answer, some say you are a prophet. Others say you are Elijah. "But you, Jesus asks, Who do you say that I am?" Then Peter speaks up. "You are the Messiah!" Jesus blesses Peter and invites the others into an understanding of who the Messiah is. He tells them that it is upon this information that He will build the church. He tells them that part of this information is his glory but part is His willingness to sacrifice for all. Peter responds that He should never suffer so and Jesus pushes him away saying, "Get behind me Satan!" (Matthew 16) For 6 days, the disciples are left to contemplate the irony between Peter's responses and the reality of Jesus' invitation.

Six days later, Matthew says, and those listening would be reminded that not everything is revealed about God's plan all at once. The fullness of the coming of Messiah is in struggling with who He is and what He intends to do. They would also be invited into the struggle of how they are called to follow Him. He is the "Son of God" who is sent to redeem the world but now He says He must first go to be crucified, killed by evil people who would seek to prevent the will of God. They begin to recognize that the choice they make will not be an easy one!

Jesus leads Peter, James and John...noticeably absent is Andrew, the other of the first four...to the top of a high mountain, alone, by themselves. The chosen disciples leave behind all the hustle and bustle of the world and withdraw. We are reminded that Jesus often withdraws to pray and sometime later the same three who would go with Him to the garden at Gethsemane and withdraw with him. Those of us who know the entire story of Jesus' journey to the cross know that Jesus trusts the will of God and completely commends His life to that will while the disciples fall asleep and are unable even to pray for an hour. We know that Jesus completes the will of God while those of the world flee from that which is at hand.

While we can learn from this event the power of prayer, we should also learn from this event that the power of God does not lie in the midst of the power of the world. When Jesus was tempted (part of our lesson for next week) Satan led him to the very centers of the world. He looked out over all the kingdoms and he stood at the edge of the highest point of the temple and was offered all the trappings of all that was there. He was at the very center of the world! In this moment, Jesus withdraws to a place far from the world in order to experience that which is often the farthest from the world, the will of God. Jesus retreats to the margins of the world, the places where those who are poor, oppressed, hungry, thirsty, in prison, sick (Matthew 25: 33 ff) find themselves. He withdraws to this point to show solidarity with those who are different from the rich and powerful. He withdraws to demonstrate the solidarity of our difference is to be part of our choice! The disciples, there by themselves recognize their loneliness and can imagine in it the loneliness of others.

Suddenly they experience what so many seek. Jesus is transfigured before them. The truth of Jesus is visible to them. He is revealed for who He is. He is the Son of God, the chosen one. They see his face and they realize that His face will illuminate the world at the point when God chooses to complete God's plan for salvation! His face is bright as the sun, all the light they need or will ever need. His face shines for them as guide to the fullness of God's promise! His clothing represents the purity of God's desire for creation. It is clean and beautiful because it is becoming perfect. It is not perfect now, at the end of the 6th day. It is good. (Gen. 1: 31) What the disciples see is the world the way it is becoming. They must make their choice based not on the way the world is, but on the way it will be!

They see Moses there talking with Jesus. They are reminded of Moses' going to the mountain and receiving God's word to God's people. They are reminded that even after Moses broke the tablets with God's word written on them, God still reached out in Love to re-write the word. They are reminded that even in all the time of disobedience to God, God loves His people so much that God chooses to reach out to them again and again. Now they are reminded that Jesus comes, the Word of God, not to abolish the word given by Moses but to fulfill it. (Matt. 5: 16) They imagine that fulfillment not in the authority of Jesus power as Messiah but in the willingness with which Jesus walks to the cross!

They see Elijah, the fulfillment of God's promise. They know that God will not complete the coming of God's Kingdom until Elijah, the one who has not known death returns to accomplish all of God's will! As Moses and Elijah talk to Jesus, they see, they hear the fullness of God's plan for Jesus' journey and how it will play out. They also recognize the falseness of the claims of others as to who Jesus really is. They observe Jesus' willingness to accomplish God's plan and they recognize God's involvement in that plan.

They still have a choice to make but it is becoming a more informed choice. As they recognize God's involvement from the beginning of creation and they contemplate the completion of God's involvement through Jesus they begin to see the fullness of God's intent. They are still processing the information and so are we.

We still struggle to accept the fullness of Messiah. We wonder why God would not send a son to accomplish righting all the wrongs of the world instead of dying for all the debts of the world. We wonder how a God who loves us so much can allow so much evil to continue to exist in our world. We struggle with the difficulties we have in our own lives and we ask how God cannot notice! We struggle! We struggle and we hurt and we grieve and we wonder.

The people of Peter's day wondered too. They saw a gap in God's involvement and they thought, if God is going to redeem everything anyway, why not enjoy a little adultery...a little greed...a little abuse of power. What harm can it possibly do to take advantage of the pleasures of this world? According to Peter, God is going to make it all right. Why not continue to wallow in the worldly pleasures while waiting on God to redeem us?

Then Peter speaks..."Lord, if you wish, let me make three booths...one for You, one for Moses and one for Elijah." In Peter's eagerness our answer is given. In his eagerness the struggles of all the world's religions are revealed. Peter believes that somehow he can construct that which is pleasing to God! He believes in that moment that he can create a monument that will symbolize God's wisdom and God's power and God's glory! Peter believes in that moment that he is in control. What God wants him to know...what God wants us to know is that God is in control!

Every major religion in the world except for Christianity struggles with the same response. We as humans struggle with the response. We want to believe there is something we can do on our own to memorialize and recognize God! We want to believe there is something we can create that will somehow be sufficient to sum up God's presence in our creation and the reality is there is nothing! Let me repeat that! There is nothing we can do! There is nothing we can do to earn God's love. There is nothing we can do to earn God's grace. God loves us infinitely. There can be no adjective before that word. God loves us uniquely! There can be no adjective before that word! In all of all, there is no creation like us and God chooses to love us. Period! End of discussion. We cannot do, we cannot be, we cannot conceive or create anything that will cause God to love us more! Because of that love, God offers God's grace...God's only son given so that we might be redeemed! Not because we have done or can do something to earn it but because God chooses to do it!

Christianity is the only religion in the world which identifies with this truth! Christianity is the choice God is offering us this morning. When we sing, *I have Decided to Follow Jesus,* that is the choice we are making. We like Peter are choosing to recognize God's power above our own and we are choosing to acknowledge that we do not deserve God's love but that we are willing to walk in God's love!

Even before Jesus can answer, the cloud, reminiscent of the cloud that covered Mt. Sinai when the word was first revealed descends and overshadows the rest of the conversation. God speaks from the cloud and says, "This is my Son, the beloved. With Him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" In these words the

choice is offered. Jesus' disciples can choose to listen to Him or not. They can choose to follow him or not. The consequences are not outlined for us today but we know scripture. Hell is metaphorically defined as eternal fire so we can graphically understand some element of pain; however, no description will describe the truth of hell. Hell is the absence of God. It is the other side of the choice we make.

Hell is the absence of God and there are those who want to accept this. That must be acceptable because it is the freedom God gives. God says we can choose him and have eternal life in God's presence or we can reject him and have eternal life in God's absence. Eternal life is available to all. God's presence is available only to those who choose God!

The disciples, overshadowed by God and overcome by the magnanimity of this choice fall down in fear. When they have the courage to look again the only one left with them is Jesus. Jesus, who has cured the lame, made the blind to see, healed the sick and shared the Good news with the poor now stands with them, alone! They walk down the mountain with Him. He has made his choice. In freedom, He chooses to set His face on Jerusalem, condemnation and the cross because He believes that on the other side is resurrection.

The disciples walk down with him with their choice still in front of them. Today as we think of transfiguration, we recognize that we walk with the disciples. We can choose and many may have. Some however still have the choice in front of them and today, in freedom they can choose to accept, reject or wait and see!

Earlier this week, there was an interesting conversation I was watching. It seems as if the national sports media is trying to start a rivalry war between the University of Kansas and Wichita State. The national media wants to incite fans from both schools to choose between one school and the other. They want to resurrect conversation that was floating around earlier in the basketball season encouraging the government of the state of Kansas to require the schools to play one another. Their attempt is to divide the state's loyalty and cause animosity among people who prefer one school over the other.

Many involved in the conversation wanted to let the national topic deteriorate into an argument over which school was better. Some argued 30 and 0 (I know it is 31 and 0 now!) while others argued 10 consecutive championships. Some argued lack of competition while other argued 6 (I know it is 7 now!) losses. Some, however wanted to argue that people in the state could actually have two favorites. They wanted to claim that even though they had followed WSU all their lives they could somehow root for KU as one of their favorites. Others wanted to take the reverse of this argument.

The two favorites argument is where I actually have to draw the line. Just as I argued earlier that there is no adjective that someone can put in front of unique, I now argue there is no adjective that can precede favorite! Something is unique because it is one of a kind. There is nothing like it. Something cannot be very unique or more unique. It is unique. The word is singularly descriptive. Favorite is the same. There cannot be more favorite or most favorite. We can like two things and we can enjoy two things but when put side by side, we must ultimately choose between the two things. If we are asked to pick one or the other with no other option, we will make the choice! The one we choose is our favorite.

Some may say this crosses categories and we can actually have favorites in more than one area. That is true but if we continue to extend the conversation continually eliminating categories and items that are less important, we will finally come down to an ultimate choice. I have loved all that Wichita State has accomplished this year. I have followed their games with curiosity and increasing interest! I will root for them to continue their win streak as long as they can extend it...until they play the University of Kansas. If that game happens, there will be no hesitation in my mind! My choice will be the University of Kansas. They are my team, my choice, my favorite! There is not a circumstance or situation in all of college basketball fandom that would cause me to choose another team to win over them in a game! That does not mean I disrespect another team or the choice someone else makes as to who is their favorite. It simply means I have made my choice. Favorite is favorite!

By the same argument, the disciples walk down the mountain with Jesus this morning. They have not solidified their choice yet! They will walk with him into crowds and healings and temptations and along the way they will have to decide as to their favorite. We know Judas chooses other than Jesus. We know that the others flee in fear on the night of Jesus' arrest. We know that we will walk down the path with Jesus for the next 40 days, the path toward Jerusalem and the Cross and yes resurrection. The choices will be hard but there is a clear favorite! Only you can choose. Only you can decide. As for me and my house, we have made the decision. (See our decision in Joshua 24)

The *Brave New World* offered in Peter's world today is essentially the same as the *Brave New World* we live in today. People make decisions based on their own best interests. They make decisions based on their own personal gain. Jesus offers a different *Brave New World!* His new world allows us to see the full potential of us as humans. It allows us the freedom to choose if and how we will love God and one another. It is not motivated by greed and lust and fear but only by love. It is this *Brave New World* God invites you to consider...no...to choose this day! Amen!