

Treasure Island: Treasure Map
Mark 3:19b-35
July 2, 2006

Have you heard of the new project creating a utopia on a Fiji island? It's an intriguing hybrid of Survivor-style reality TV show, holiday time share, and backpacker resort. Five thousand strangers from around the world are being invited to live as a "tribe" on a remote South Pacific island. Only 100 people at a time will live on Vorovoro, an island in Fiji complete with a cave once used by pirates and an ancient burial site. The remainder of the "tribe" will form a global online community voting by e-mail on everything from how to generate energy to which crops to grow. The goal is to create a sustainable ecocommunity in the tropics. Renamed Adventure Island, the hope is that creating a utopian community will be easier given sophisticated technology such as e-mail, the Internet, chat rooms, and air travel. Sociologists, however, are not so sure even this experiment in harmonious community cooperation can succeed.¹

Wouldn't it be fun to have a blank slate, an open field, uncharted territory on which to craft a new society? In essence that is what our forefathers and foremothers of this country did when they came to settle in the wilderness of North America. They arrived with grand hopes and dreams for a land of freedom. They set in place a system of government to secure and protect that freedom. It is that freedom that we celebrate this week, for we are the grateful benefactors of their grand vision.

Creating a new community is what Jesus' ministry is all about. In the verses immediately preceding those we heard this morning, Jesus goes up the mountain. In the Bible mountains are typically places of revelations and new creations. On this mountain Jesus calls under his leadership the twelve apostles. They are to be in ministry with him, sent out to proclaim the good news, and given authority to cast out demons. Jesus creates a new community that will take precedence in the lives of his followers, a community intended to be a foretaste of the reign of God on earth.

Jesus is at a disadvantage because his new community of followers must live within the constraints of an old community. There are structures, rules, and traditions already established in stone. It is much harder to reorganize a corporation than it is to create a new culture. It is a great challenge to overthrow the old in order to make way for the new. I sometimes envy my colleagues who start new congregations, because they can shape the culture of the congregation from the beginning and don't have to deal with baggage from the past! Jesus doesn't start with a clean slate,

with an uninhabited island, with a plot to craft as he desires. That's why he gets into so much trouble with the authorities and even with his own family. Jesus arrives bringing the treasure map designed by God, a vision of the reign of God in all its fullness.

Jesus comes home from that glorious mountaintop experience of appointing his apostles only to find a crowd filling the house so that they can't even get to the kitchen for food. What's worse, his family comes to take him away, for they've heard the rumors that the authorities are out to get Jesus because he is crazy. It's even hard even to get support from our families for our idealistic, utopian, newfangled ideas and visions. Typically the call of God grates against that which has been our custom and tradition.

Jesus' family thinks that he is "out of his mind." Another translation says he is "beside himself." That's a phrase we sometimes use: "I'm beside myself with worry or grief." It means that we are so overcome with emotion that we can't contain it or control it. We stand outside of our normal centered self – "beside myself." We are greatly distracted. The word used to describe Jesus' state is *ekstasis*, which can mean either distraction or ecstasy. Literally, it means a "change of place," such as being besides oneself, outside one's usual place. Figuratively, it can mean "confusion of spirit," among other things.

His family and the religious scholars are trying to peg Jesus as neurotically disturbed. But Jesus is not deranged or possessed in an unhealthy way. However, he may indeed be ecstatic, in the sense of being outside of his human place and so filled with the Holy Spirit of God that he acts in a manner that is foreign to the culture. Because the Spirit of God has so infused him, he has been given a vision by God, a vision that differs from that of the world. Jesus' vision of the will and reign of God is so strange that he is deemed crazy. Nevertheless, in divine light, Jesus is right in sync with God's desire for the world. Jesus isn't out of his mind; it is everyone else who is crazy!

Indeed Jesus is seeing things that no one else can see, because he sees with the eyes of the Spirit. Others are blind to the possibilities that Jesus can imagine. They are so stuck in "the way it has always been" that they can't see the new things that God is doing right before their very eyes. Jesus sees as God sees.

It is like the Christians who built the Cathedral Church in Seville, Spain. Before they began construction in 1401, they wrote a resolution, and signed it, as a statement of their dream and vision in building that church. The resolution read thus: "Let us build here a church so great that those who come after us will think us mad ever to have dreamed of it."² Persons who

have grand visions are often thought mad, but without their dreams, the world would be far less grand.

Bill Moyers has a new series on PBS called *Faith and Reason*. He is interviewing various authors who were part of a writers' festival on the theme "Faith and Reason." Salman Rushdie, of *The Satanic Verses* fame, was the first to be interviewed, as he was the organizer of the writers' festival. Moyers asked him why he asked writers, rather than preachers and theologians, to speak on faith and reason. Rushdie replied that authors have a sense of imagination that is necessary in the venture of faith. They are able to think beyond what is and see the possibilities for what may be.

That's what Jesus is about. He sees the map as it has been drawn and he sees how society has fallen far short of the dream of God. He is able to see the treasure restored, the hope fulfilled, the dream realized. Perhaps he is indeed ecstatic because he sees beyond what is to what could be. His life does not revolve around the cultural norms of the day nor even around his immediate relatives. He finds his center in doing the will of God. There he finds the passion, the love, and the grace that makes him ecstatic, joyous, filled with the Spirit.

Sometimes we get too stuck inside ourselves that we become immobilized. Our imaginations grow dull. Our vision narrows. C. S. Lewis told a story of an artist who was thrown into a dungeon in which the only light came from a barred window high above. In the dungeon, the woman gave birth to a son. As he grew, she told him about the outside world, a world of wheat fields and mountain streams and cresting emerald waves crashing on golden shores.

But the boy couldn't understand her words. So with the drawing pad and pencils she had brought with her into the dungeon, she drew him pictures. At first she thought he understood. But one day while talking with him, she realized he didn't. He thought the outside world was made up of charcoal-gray pencil lines on faded-white backgrounds, and concluded that the world outside the dungeon was less than the world inside.

The story is a parable, showing us in much the same way the artist tried to show her son that all we see before us are merely pencil sketches of the world beyond us. Every person is a stick-figured image of God; every place of natural beauty, a charcoal rendering of Paradise; every pleasure, a flat and faded version of the joy that awaits us. We need to be boosted to a window before we can see beyond the lines of our own experience. Only then will we see how big the trees are, how bright the flowers, how breathtaking the view.³

It is healthy to step outside ourselves occasionally and realize that things don't have to be the way they've always been. The treasure to be found is far greater than we have already discovered. We need to get outside of ourselves, to find our center in God. Life can easily become stagnant. We yearn to be filled with the Spirit of God, to be opened to the treasure yet to be revealed, to experience the new thing that God is doing in our lives. God is ready to act; we simply need to be willing to stretch the boundaries. We can chart new territory, forge new relationships, mine nuggets of gold when we allow ourselves to be swept up into the dream of God.

The key to discovering the divine treasure map and the dream of God is found in doing the will of God. In his closing comments about his family, Jesus continues to think "outside the box." Jesus appeals to a higher law to legitimate his actions. Doing the will of God becomes the standard by which he redefines family boundaries.

It is good to occasionally examine the map we've been following and the directions we have been led in our lives. Would Jesus recognize his values and principles in practice today? Are the paths we walk consistent with the guidelines that Jesus established for the new community of those who do the will of God?

As we celebrate our nation's birth, it is a good time to evaluate where we have been and where we are going? Are we being faithful to the values and traditions established by our founders? What boundaries have we established? What is the state of our relationships with brothers and sisters in the human family? Are our power struggles diminishing precious resources that could better be used to enhance life?

Being part of Jesus' new community of disciples means living not by the strictures of society or cultural norms; it means centering ourselves in the will of God, not only for ourselves but for our human brothers and sisters. Searching for the lasting treasures of life entails being seen as somewhat crazy, "beside ourselves," ecstatic, seeing what others cannot see because we are joyfully filled with the Spirit of God. May we be bold to follow the treasure map designed by God, for it truly leads to the most meaningful and joyous treasures to be found.

¹ Nick Squires, "'Tribe' wanted – to create the ideal life on a Fiji island," *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 23, 2006, pp. 1, 5.

² James A. Harnish, "How Far Can You See?" Tampa, Florida, June 12, 1994. Retrieved from Homiletics Online June 29, 2006.

³ Ken Gire, *Windows of the Soul* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), p. 84. Retrieved from Homiletics Online June 29, 2006.

Rev. Lori Best Sawdon

Lafayette United Methodist Church, Lafayette, CA