

Walking with Jesus ...  
...when the Devil's Telling you to Stay on the Couch  
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Matthew 4:1-11  
Lent 1A

We're talking about walking with Jesus on Sundays this Lent. I love that phrase, walking with Jesus. It implies that the Christian life is a journey. Every day gives us choices to make. Every encounter brings us someone to serve. Each is another step on our walk with Jesus. But I think it also implies that discipleship is meant to be more of a process than an achievement. Yet how many of us treat faith as something to be accomplished? Too often, it can seem our walk with Jesus feels like one more item to be checked off the to-do list: *run kids to hockey, pick up milk, finish that report, go to church, empty dishwasher, pay bills, call grandma*. Sound familiar? Don't feel bad ... it's not just you. We've all got too much to do and not enough time to do it in. We may mean to walk with Jesus, but sometimes it's all we can do to keep walking, period.

I'll be honest, one of the reasons I never stop moving is that I know when I sit down for the night, I'm not getting up again. All it takes is a few minutes off my feet and I lose my motivation to keep going. Ever hear of Newton's first law of motion? It goes, *a body in motion will stay in motion, and a body at rest will stay at rest*. That body at rest is ruled by inertia, which I'm convinced is one of the most powerful forces on earth. It's what keeps you on the comfy couch when you know you ought to be heading to the gym. Inertia can trap you in a job that doesn't bring you joy, or in a relationship that desperately needs a visit to a counselor's office. Fighting inertia is like breaking a bad habit: it takes time, discipline and commitment – three things that can get in the way of our to-do lists. It's easier to just going through the motions. And when things don't turn out the way you planned, or you run into unexpected difficulty, you lose momentum and just staying on the couch begins to look pretty good.

Inertia can affect our faith lives, too. Sure, sometimes we feel super-close to God, like when we've had one of those mountaintop experiences Pastor Jason talked about last week. Maybe you've been on a mission trip or you've seen something spectacular in nature or a big prayer that's answered just the way you wanted. That's a huge boost of energy for your walk with Jesus. But if it's been awhile since you've been on the mountain, you can find yourself mumbling through the same liturgy or praying the same prayers without thinking about what you're saying. You forget to look for God or get out of the habit of saying thank you. Not long ago I visited with a woman who admitted it had been long time since she'd been to church. *What happened*, I asked her. *Why'd you stop coming?* Her response: *I don't know. After a few weeks I guess I sort of forgot about it.* That's inertia.

Why does this happen? I think at times it's because we've been fooled into thinking that life is meant to be easy. Jesus told the disciples that he came that they might have abundant life. I hear abundant and think: nice house, great job, fulfilling relationships with my kids. So when my little angels aren't being so angelic, I find myself feeling sorry for myself. Where is Jesus when life is hard?

And, I think at times, we've been fooled into thinking that life is meant to be simple. Issues should be black and white, details manageable, relationships pleasant. But we live in a world of ethical decisions with no clear answers, and information overload, and complex cultural differences. It takes a lot of effort and creativity to make your way. Where is Jesus when life is complicated?

And, I think at times, we've been fooled into thinking that life is meant to be fair. That God is on our side and we all get what we deserve. So how do you explain to a child why their parent died, or how an earthquake can wipe entire cities off the map, or that sometimes dreams don't come true. Where is Jesus when life is cruel?

Does any of that resonate with you? Do you find yourself expecting that life will be easy, simple, fair? You're not the only one. But how we respond to these statements says a lot about our discipleship journey. Will adversity make your faith in God stronger, or will hitting a bump in the road send you straight to the couch?

Shortly after one of the greatest moments in his life, Jesus faced one of the darkest ones. He went from the baptismal waters of the Jordan, God's words of love ringing in his ears, to the oppressive heat of the desert and the tempter quoting scripture at him. If Jesus thought life was meant to be easy, why wouldn't he make himself some bread and feed his hunger? If Jesus thought life was meant to be fair, why wouldn't he expect God to save him when he was in danger? If Jesus thought life was meant to be simple, why wouldn't he do the one thing that would guarantee him immediate results?

This story makes it sound as if standing up to temptation is no big deal. Quote a few Bible verses, pray a few prayers and pretty soon adversity will flee and angels will take care of you. But I believe one reason Jesus succeeded is because he didn't let himself get trapped by inertia. He knew he was on a journey. He had a mission from God, a relationship with his father that gave him strength when he was weak and courage when he was afraid and purpose when he felt like giving up.

I don't know where you are on your faith journey ... maybe you're on the mountaintop. Maybe it feels like you're stuck in the wilderness. You might even be curled up on the couch. But I do know this: there's a man heading to Jerusalem. His trip will change the world. And he wants you to come along. Will you walk with Jesus today? He will give you strength when you are weak, courage when you are afraid, and purpose when you feel like giving up. Amen.