



February 4, 2018

Reverend Aaron Gordon

"The Rolling Stone" Mark 1:29-39

— A rolling stone gathers no moss. God's mission often requires movement. Movement is hard to do when you are settled in and comfortable. But God's plan is more important. We must do what we were meant to do.

I am sorry to say that this sermon is not about the band the Rolling Stones. Sorry to disappoint if you were excited about that. Even though it is Super Bowl Sunday, and the stones did play the halftime show in 2006, don't be mistaken. We are going to talk about Jesus. Jesus was the original Rolling Stone. Even before the magazine existed, before the band, before Bob Dylan even wrote the song "Like a Rolling Stone." Let me explain.

Many of you have heard the old proverb, "a rolling stone grows no moss." If a stone is always on the move, it can't form a suitable base for moss to grow. Moss needs stability and consistency. Movement destroys the ability for moss to grow on a rock.

In our scripture from Mark this morning, Jesus can't stay in one place. He is focused on His mission. Jesus came to spread the good news, and that is what he has to do. Jesus had to keep moving. He said so himself in Matthew 8:20, ... "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." Jesus had to keep moving. Jesus was sent into the world with a far reaching mission. Jesus could never have accomplished His mission if he had stayed in Capernaum. Much to the disappointment of many who expected to find him in the town of Capernaum, that is.

Jesus is our Rock and our Redeemer, just like Psalm 19 says. But Jesus was always moving, like a rolling stone. No matter how good things seemed, Jesus couldn't stand still because his job was to do something GREAT, not settle for something that is good. You and I can learn from Jesus's example. That is because you and I have been included in Jesus's mission. We ought not get to comfortable with our current circumstances. Comfort in our circumstances is like moss that grows on a stone. If we

get to comfortable in our jobs, our homes, our relationships, our routines, we might not want to follow Jesus by going outside our comfort zone. God wants us to be meeting new people and preaching to them with our words and deeds.

The message from scripture this morning is that you and I, together with all of God's people, are called to live in this world, but we do not belong here. We are strangers, or foreigners, or refugees in this world. We should not get too comfortable here.

In 1 Peter 17, we read, "Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear." Peter reminds us that we are all "strangers in a strange land" when we put our faith in Jesus. We are citizens of heaven, and have an important mission given to us by God. We are called to act differently from others who do not believe. We must not let the comforts of this world keep us from taking part in God's redemption plan. We have to keep on rolling along, like rolling stones.

This is a HARD teaching of Jesus. One of the hardest teachings that Jesus ever taught. But if you understand and try to live out this teaching, your life will almost certainly make God happy. Jesus did not get comfortable where he was. So it follows that we ought not get overly comfortable where we are Well, the opposite of comfort is DIS-comfort. Also known as PAIN. You've heard the expression "no pain, no gain?" I think that sums up why it is so hard to follow Jesus. People don't like to feel any kind of pain, physical or emotional. Following Jesus is painful. But all the pain serves a higher purpose, and only hurts so much because we have such weak faith in God. That's just how we sinful humans are. But I doubt the original Apostles were super-happy that Jesus kept on rolling from place to place, getting into trouble.

In our scripture from Mark this morning, we read about the very early days of Jesus's public ministry. And things were going remarkably well according to Mark! Jesus found the perfect spot to set up shop as a teacher and a healer. Jesus had just called some of his first disciples in the Galilee area, which was a beautiful, green area. There is a huge lake there. I visited Galilee in 2012 and if it was like what I saw when Jesus was alive, it was an ideal place to be. Jesus's kicks off his earthly ministry in a lakeside town called Capernaum. His ministry starts out well. People are amazed that he teaches with authority and can cast out demons. His miraculous healing is impressive as well. As soon as the word goes out, people start coming in from all over town, bringing people to be healed, and coming to listen to his teachings about God. Seems like a good start to spreading the Good news that the Kingdom of Heaven has come near!

But Jesus doesn't settle for good. He can't. He was sent to do something GREAT. And so, Jesus heads out of town and hikes up a hill to be alone and pray. When the disciples caught up, they told Jesus everyone was looking for him. I am sure even more people showed up overnight to be healed and to learn from Jesus.

Instead of worrying about the crowd looking for him, Jesus says, let's go to another town. That is why I came in the first place! And from that time on, he travelled around the whole region, preaching and healing. And we know from the scriptures that people in the rest of the region were not always as receptive to Jesus as they were in Capernaum.

The mission that Jesus began can not be carried out without movement. Jesus explains this ongoing mission to his disciples in Luke 24, "he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things."

You and I are called to follow Jesus in our lives. We are called to keep rolling toward our goal of preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all nations, starting in our home town. Every time we have movement in our life, it is an opportunity to preach in Jesus name. And so we ought to prepare ourselves to keep moving.

Moving to a different place is one way to keep moving, but that is not the only way to keep moving. You can have movement even if you do not move away. Movement doesn't only mean physical relocation. Movement can mean that we make new relationships. That we keep getting better and better at loving God and loving others. If a selfish person learns to be generous, that is movement. If you change jobs, that is another kind of movement because you have a new set of people to be in relationship with. Movement simply means a change that draws you closer to being like Jesus.

It is important for me to emphasize that movement has to be change that draws you closer to being like Jesus. Otherwise, change is just motion, but not movement. Movement is motion that is directed toward a specific goal or location. Not simply change for change's sake.

The opposite of movement is doing nothing, having everything stay basically the same. This is a sure way to limit your ability to participate in Jesus's mission to preach repentance for forgiveness of sins to all the nations.

Back to our rolling stone example, getting comfortable with things the way they are is like a stone sitting around, growing moss. The moss represents all the obligations

and circumstances and routines that keep us from being effective preachers of Jesus in our lives. The moss anchors down the rock and makes it even harder for the stone to roll. And that is what the Devil wants for us. The Devil wants us to live like stones covered in moss, too comfortable to make much of a difference for Jesus.

So we must resist the moss and keep rolling. Jesus set this example for us in scripture, and there are many applications for us as a congregation, in our work, and in our personal lives. If we are going to follow Jesus's example we must be like a rolling stone, always rolling toward the goal... to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ.

As a congregation, we can continue rolling by building change into the way we organize ourselves. Every ministry program that we implement ought to have a life-span. When that program is no longer effective or producing repentance in people's lives, we should stop it and do something different. Many ministry programs in many congregations run on for decades after they have become irrelevant because they are comfortable. When someone says to you "that's the way we've always done it" to resist change, what they are really telling you they are too comfortable with the way things are.

Not only programs, but everything in the congregation should serve the people in worshipping God and making disciples. The building, the staff, the music, the liturgy are some examples. All these things are tools for the congregation's ongoing mission. When the congregation starts serving the stuff and not the other way around, it is time for a change in order to break the comfort.

In our work, we can continue rolling by not being afraid to stand up for what is right even if it has a cost for our career. Jesus loves justice and part of repentance is making people aware of injustice so that they might change their minds. An example of this might be, if your boss asks you to do something shady or to lie. If you refuse, and expose your boss, you will likely not get promoted. That will hurt your career and could even get you fired! You are comfortable getting that paycheck. Being out of work and finding a new job would be discomfort to the max. But you will be following Jesus, preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins. You may not use those exact words, but you are standing up for truth and righteousness and exposing sin. This is a large part of what Jesus did in his earthly ministry. But comfort can keep us from taking action to follow Jesus.

In our personal lives, we can continue rolling by making sure we don't invest all our social energy into a closed group of friends. This is super important if you want to follow Jesus. Jesus did not only make relationships with his relatives and his friends who were like him. No, Jesus hung out with the undesirables and engaged socially with

many different people. In fact, that is one reason why Jesus had to keep moving from town to town. Jesus could have had everyone come to Capernaum to be ministered to. But that would have been too comfortable. He would have dealt with mostly the same people day in and day out. Instead, Jesus took his disciples and went from town to town. Constantly changing shop keepers and innkeepers. Each town had a different Synagogue to preach in, and a new community to engage.

I have seen many people fall into a rut where they have mostly the same friends they knew from high school or college, and they go through life in this small, closed circle. The attitude seems to be, am comfortable with my people, and we are all good. I don't really need any new people in my life. And that may be true, but God asks us to live our lives for God and not only for ourselves. When we open our lives and make space for new people to be in relationship with us, we live out Jesus's mission to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins in Jesus name. When new folks get to know us, and see us struggle to live for Jesus, that, along with our words will show them God's salvation in Jesus. It might be risky and uncomfortable to invest in relationships with new, unknown people. But if we don't practice doing this, we are not making any movement in the mission of Jesus to the world/ Jesus could have stayed in Capernaum, and only invested in his close circle of friends. But instead, he got right up in new people's lives, healing them, and teaching them about God.

You and I are called to follow Jesus, the original rolling stone, in our lives. We are called to keep rolling toward our goal of preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all nations, starting in our home town. It may be tempting not to move, and to collect the moss of comfort. But we need to shake off the moss and get rolling. Every time we have movement in our life, it is an opportunity to preach in Jesus name.