**SUNDAY 9/12/21**

**SERMON**

**MARK 8:** **27-38**

In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children

 as they picked out and learned a how to play, a musical instrument.

Some went on to become fine musicians, and some faltered.

McPherson searched for the traits that separated those

 who progressed from, those who did not.

IQ was not a good predictor.

Neither were aural sensitivity, math skills, income, or a sense of rhythm.

The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students

 before they even selected their instruments:

“How long do you think you will play?”

The students who planned to play for a short time, did not become very proficient.

The students who planned to play for a few years, had modest success.

But there were some children who said, in effect:

“I want to be a musician. I'm going to play my whole life.”

Those children were the ones who became musicians.

So it is with those who choose to follow Jesus.

Those who say, "I'll try it for a little while," usually don't do well.

But those who say, "I'm going to follow Jesus my whole life,"

 make a difference.

They may stumble often, but over the long haul,

 they become all that God has called them to be.

They continue to follow Him, in the good times and in the tough times.

They don't give up, they don't quit.

They are the ones who really make a difference.

They are the ones who focus on divine things, not human things.

A married lady went out shopping one day,

 and when she returned home she brought with her a beautiful dress.

She showed it to her husband,

 who almost had a stroke when he heard how much it cost.

She agreed with him that it was very expensive,

 but she said she tried it on,

 and she looked so beautiful in it,

 she couldn't resist the temptation to buy it.

Her husband told her you should have said, "Get behind me, Satan."

She answered: "That's exactly what I said."

And Satan said, "You look fabulous from back here too!"

Who we listen to makes a real difference in our lives.

We can listen to our own thoughts and follow them,

 or we can listen to the temptations of Satan,

 or we can listen to Jesus, and follow in His footsteps.

Which we choose, will make all the difference in our lives,

 and in the lives of those around us.

Mike was very enthusiastic about his wife Jennifer participating in a triathlon.

She had trained very hard for months, and was in such great shape.

Mike was confident she could finish in the top 10 spots.

But Jennifer knew better and tried to tell him.

But he didn't listen.

It was only after he watched the other swimmers, bikers, and runners,

 that he understood.

He really knew nothing about woman's athletics.

It became even clearer after she finished.

They were walking back to their car near the race path,

 when a lovely older lady,

 a grandmother in her early seventies,

 came around the last bend on her bike with a basket.

People began to clap and cheer enthusiastically.

The determined woman was the last participant to cross the finish line.

In that moment, Mike realized it wasn't about winning the race,

 as the world defines winning.

It was about the process, and about finishing,

 and about never giving up until the race was complete.

Jesus did not tell us we had to be number one.

He simply wants us to continue to follow Him,

 and keep on doing whatever task He gives us to accomplish.

This is not the decision of a moment, but a program for a lifetime.

He promised to be with us always.

We can often become discouraged, but He helps us to keep on going.

There is a Bible series called "Mushrooms and Maple Trees".

Mushrooms sprout up overnight and then wither away in a matter of days.

But Maple trees grow gradually while learning to withstand

 the forces of nature which threaten their existence.

They continue to grow slowly but majestically.

They result in fantastically strong trees which last for generations.

Gale force winds may blow,

 ice and snow may cover branches, and break some of them,

 fires may cause damage to some of the trees.

But the sturdy Maple trees stand their ground, and continue to grow.

So it is with people who follow Jesus.

Unfortunately, some wither away very rapidly.

But others grow deep and strong,

 and produce the fruit of life which God designed for them.

However, even the smallest task God sets before us is important.

In spite of hardships and difficulties, we continue with God's help,

 to keep on growing and maturing.

Some time ago, back in the mid-50's, Parker Brothers created a board game

 called "Going to Jerusalem."

The game pieces were little plastic disciples,

 with a robe, beard, sandals, and a staff.

In order to move around the board the players,

 had to look up answers in a little black New Testament

 provided with the game.

Each of the players started their plastic disciples in Bethlehem.

They made stops at the Mount of Olives, Bethsaida, Capernaum,

 the Sea of Galilee, Nazareth, and Bethany.

It was possible, if one was very lucky, with two rolls of the dice,

 to go directly to the Triumphal Entry.

However, the game never got to the Crucifixion, or the Resurrection.

There were no demons, or angry Pharisees.

In this board game each player made their way through the nice stories,

 and the adventure was always safe,

 and suited for a nice Christian family to play,

 on a Sunday afternoon walk with Jesus.

Unfortunately, traveling with Jesus isn't about being little plastic disciples

 who only go through the nice stories,

 and never get to the cross.

Following Jesus is trusting Him in the tough times,

 following Him in the dark times,

 obeying Him, even when we don't understand,

 and knowing He is with us, always.

We are not little plastic disciples.

We are meant to be His followers.

We are meant to continue to share the story with others,

 to love our neighbors,

 and our enemies,

 to forgive one another,

 to help each other,

 and to follow Him wherever He leads us.

Jesus asked them, "Who do you say I am?"

And Peter replied,

“You are the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One, the Son of God.”

The disciple's definition of Messiah was not yet the same

 as Jesus' definition of Messiah.

The disciples were looking for a Messiah who would rescue them

 from their oppression from Roman rule,

 take away all their troubles in life.

But Jesus offers eternal life with Him.

AMEN