



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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The Reverse Comfort Zone in Giving God Room to Work

Mark 1:29-31

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Including testimony by Claudia Aills

We talk a lot about getting outside our comfort zone at this church.

If we're interested in the truth, we need to talk comfort zones.

After all, everything I truly want to be in life is outside my comfort zone.

But what if...What if getting outside my comfort zone means doing LESS, rather than more???

What if it means slowing down? (That can be uncomfortable...)

And instead of moving OUT more, it involves inviting God IN more???

What if getting outside my comfort zone means, in reality, allowing God *inside* my comfort zone that I've set up?

The truth is, we go around with a "reverse" comfort zone, into which we allow very few things...

But what happens when we allow Christ to have full access...to us? Talk about moving outside your comfort zone! The Hebrew word for God's Holy Spirit is *ruach*, which means "wind, or breath." And just like when you see weather patterns, the wind moves from high pressure to low pressure, so it is with God's Spirit. If we can create a low pressure zone within our lives, God's Holy Spirit can move more freely into our lives. So before you stress out, I want to tell you, for most of us, the way to give God more room to work in your life...is to do less.

Mark 1:29 *"As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. 30 Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. 31 So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them."*

"As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon's mother-in-law..." Mark 1:29. The synagogue was behind them. It was a building much like our church, for study and worship. They had a big room to gather, listen to Scripture, and sing songs. They had rooms like Sunday school rooms. (They didn't have indoor plumbing either!☺)

As soon as they left this public place for worshipping God, they went to Simon Peter's house. (Jesus and his 4 disciples). This was early in his ministry. Just the week before, Jesus asked them "Yo, follow me." They dropped their nets and followed him...

And today was a Sabbath day. Jesus had taught and cast out demons. And they head on to Simon's house. Sounds simple, but keep your eyes peeled: **We're leaving the synagogue and taking Jesus home with us.** And this is where it gets a little weird. You see, everybody can come to Synagogue. You don't need ID, or a membership card. But look out. We are now going to private space. We're sensitive to private space. You guard your private space. That's not bad. It's saying "I love you, but, I've got to feel that I can leave you and go."

The danger is we often leave Jesus in the public space. It's intimidating to think of Jesus going home with

us. Do you remember the first time you took college friends home with you? It's nerve racking. I remember when I brought Leigh home with me for the first time, to meet my parents. I felt vulnerable. What if she doesn't like it in Michigan? Have you ever felt that way? "What if they judge me?" When people come to your home, they might appraise me and critique me. I want them to see my professional self. But now they're coming home. And I don't have the protection of my professional garb.

What was Peter thinking? Moving Jesus out of the public arena of the synagogue, and taking Jesus home with him? What if "Giving God Room to Work" isn't just about church on Huron River Drive, Jesus in the public space? What if it's about taking Jesus home with me?

Jesus is interested in entering our private space. So Jesus goes to the fisherman's house. We get there, and the door is shut. There's no aroma of fish and chips. We open the door, and the dishes aren't done. The house is not swept. And Mark tells us, "*Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her.*" *Mark 1:30*

That's it, isn't it? You go with someone home, and you just never know what you find. All we know is that she has a fever. It's a clue that something is not quite right. She's not well. She's spiked a fever. Something is the matter.

"So he went to her..." Mark 1:31

And Jesus moves from the private space of the living room, to the private of the private. Jesus goes into her bedroom, where she is lying with a fever.

Jesus goes deeper, deeper into the private space.

And Jesus does something extraordinary. He touches her.

They can't believe it! What if she's contagious?

They are worried she might be contagious.

Well...what if...just what if...Wellness is contagious. Wellness is contagious.

You might be surprised. Maybe your goodness is contagious. Maybe you protect yourself from the wrong crowd, and you don't get infected by their sinfulness, but you share your wellness with them—the wellness of Jesus Christ.

Let's say I believe this story and that goodness is contagious? Jesus said, "*You are the salt of the earth...you are the light of the world.*" *Matthew 5:13, 14.* Let's say salt isn't just for the shelf...but for the food, poured out. Let's say the light isn't just for the closet, but to be put up on a lamp stand. Let's say I dare to go where things are *wrong*, because goodness is contagious. Let's say I go where there is hatred, because love is contagious.

"So he went to her, took her hand, and helped her up. The fever left her..." Mark 1:31. Is it possible, that when we touch hatred, anger, resentment, and hurt, that WE can be contagious? That goodness and love can be contagious! Take Jesus to your private of private places, and your fever comes down, Mark says. Take Jesus to your private of private places, and give Him room to work. And your fever comes down, and you become well. Your life becomes transformed...and begins again! Mark says "*and she began to do ministry*" (1:31).

INTRODUCE CLAUDIA AILLS' TESTIMONY.

Claudia: "Good Morning. We are here today to reflect on and celebrate 18 months of giving God Room to Work. You have only to look at our new youth center to see that we have much to celebrate. Yet if giving God room to work stopped there, all we would have is an empty appearance of growth. But our church is anything but empty!

There's so much that's movin' and shakin' inside this church! That's because we've given God room to work within our congregation, through things like our focus on small groups. Still, giving God room to work can't stop there, either. Even people that are active in church could still be feeling empty or lost. At

the very heart of our church's spiritual growth is each of us giving God room to work in our own lives.

You may be thinking, "That's easy for you to say!" But I know first-hand that giving God room to work is not easy. It is a testament to God's wonderful grace and faithfulness that I every figured it out. You see, in the past 18 months, I have experienced the power of giving God room to work in my life. As most of you may know, I have the wonderful privilege of leading God's Kids children's choir. I would like to share with you the incredible story of how God called me to this music ministry.

My family began attending Dexter United Methodist Church three years ago. Like many of you, we were attracted by the friendliness of the congregation. We had been looking for a church that had lots of kids and programs for our daughter, Molly – and this church certainly has lots of kids!

A few months later, we joined the church, and started to get involved. Mark and I were greeters for a while, we attended different church functions, and I tried a year of teaching Sunday school. Nothing really felt right – I wanted to do something that God wanted me to do, but I had no idea of how to go about finding what that might be.

Then the summer before last, Matt preached a sermon about "Pathways to Christ" that made me think about myself as a Christian in a new way. He told us that God created us all differently, so naturally we would not all find the same spiritual pathway to a relationship with Christ. The pathway that fit me involved worshipping with others through hymns and praise. As I listened to Matt tell about this "Worship Pathway," I felt as if he was telling the congregation all about me. The people who regularly sit near me in church can tell you that I sing the hymns with all my heart. I can't help it! Fortunately for everyone around me, God gave me the family gene for carrying a tune, unlike a few of my tone-deaf family members.

Every Sunday from then on, I sang with more gusto than ever! God made me to praise and worship him in this way, and it felt great doing it. I started to think about joining the choir; but I didn't have time to do anything more than what I was already doing, and choir practice on Thursday evenings was just impossible! Thursday was the night Mark and Molly had "Daddy-Daughter Night," and I worked late in my classroom. Thursday night was the only thing, in my mind, keeping my head above water.

In the next few months, I began to feel very frustrated. My life felt out of whack, and I didn't have a clue of what to do about it. One Sunday, Matt and Steve asked each of us to identify our greatest need and write it on a card. The card I turned in read, "I want to find balance in my life to allow time to pursue a spiritual relationship with God."

In the spring, I decided to join the choir for the Easter season, and it was just as difficult to give up Thursday nights as I thought it would be. But the struggle paled in light of the joy I felt while singing God's praises with other believers. By fall, I knew that I needed to join the choir – not that I'd solved the problem of having enough time. I just decided that I'd have to try it and see what happened. On that first Thursday night, shortly after school started, I stood in my elementary classroom surrounded with a multitude of important tasks. I took a deep breath and said, "Well, God, you're going to just have to make this okay." And I walked out the door. The pile of stuff was still waiting for me the next day, and mysteriously it did not grow to gigantic proportions over the next few weeks as I continued to go to choir. It did not bury me. In fact, I seemed to be able to get everything done without hauling a bunch of extra work home each weekend.

One Sunday a few months later, I went to church feeling good about the pathway I was traveling toward Christ. I loved singing in the choir, and Mark and I were looking at other ways to get involved in the church. During the service, Sue Aeschliman sang a song with a group of kids, some of whom were about Molly's age. I searched the bulletin to see when this choir met because I wanted Molly to join the kid's choir. After the service, I leaned forward to ask Cathy Leadley about it – a question that changed my life in ways I couldn't even have imagined.

Cathy told me that there was no kid's choir because they couldn't find anyone to lead it. "How sad!" I said. Then she looked at me and asked, "How about you? Would you lead it?" At that moment, it wasn't Cathy looking through her eyes at me. It was Jesus. The sounds of the sanctuary faded away as his look and his question spoke to my very heart. Then the sanctuary noises rushed back in and I was stammering something about how I couldn't possibly. I probably said something about not having time, or not knowing how.

As I left the church, I could not get the kid's choir out of my mind. It was terrible that the kids didn't have a chance to sing. Singing God's praises gives me so much joy, and brings me close to God. I couldn't stand the thought of the kids not feeling that, too. Maybe I could do it. But what was I thinking? I didn't know how to direct a choir! I couldn't even play the piano for Heaven's sake. I was crazy to even think about it. The same thoughts raced around my mind for days, and no matter how many times I assured God

that I did not know the first thing about directing a choir, the thought that I should would not leave me.

The next week, at a small group leadership meeting, Linda Vander Haagen told us to remember that “God does not call the qualified. He qualifies the called.” She may have been talking about leading a small group, but I heard God once again calling me to lead the choir. Finally, I told my family about the decision I was trying to make. Mark listened with wonder. When I finished, I asked, “What do you think?” He wiped his eyes and said, “Well, it sounds like God wants you to lead the choir.”

So, I had one conversation with Steve and a month later I was leading God’s Kids. It has been an incredible experience. I really still do not know exactly what I am doing, but I’ve had faith all along that God would make things work out. And he has! When you see me directing the kids, you need to know that I am not alone - God is working through me. It is an experience that brings me more joy than I ever thought possible.

Pretty amazing, huh? Who would have thought that someone who didn’t even have time for an hour-a-week choir practice would be able to find time to plan and direct a whole choir? Or direct a Christmas pageant, and still decide to do a spring musical this April? 18 months ago, I couldn’t have imagined it either. I was struggling to find balance in my life to make time for a spiritual relationship with God. But I had it backwards. Instead, I needed to pursue a spiritual relationship with God in order to find balance in my life. I had let my inability to find balance shut God out, when God was the solution to the problem in the first place.

God can work in your life in a real and tangible way, too. Perhaps He’s waiting for you to let Him in, just like he was waiting for me. How can you give God room to work in your life? It may be something as simple as trusting he’ll make a little leap of faith work – like going to choir when you “know” you don’t have the time. You’ll never know where that leap of faith will take you, but I say, “Go for it!” There is great joy to be found in placing yourself, even for a small moment, in God’s hands.”

MATT: I love the leaders of this church. We have some of the greatest leaders on the face of the earth! I think Claudia put it perfectly. We say we need “balance” before we can GGRTW. But that’s backwards. It’s when we GGRTW on the inside especially, His wellness gives us the balance & peace we crave. Saying yes to “Giving God Room to Work” means saying “no” to other things that fill your space. Simply not allowing certain things like your fears and expectations to control you. You’ll actually accomplish more in life by doing less. Less is more. You will accomplish more by doing less, by being totally committed to two or three things that really matter than half-committed to a dozen or two dozen different things. Rest in Him. His rest is a gift. His limits are a gift, and a way to give God room to work in your life. You can accomplish more for the world out there when you allow Jesus room to work in “here.” (your heart). Allow Jesus to move beyond your inner comfort zone, and give

Let’s pray: Lord Jesus, you know our private space. We feel vulnerable, intimidated, anxious. This week, we want to invite you to our private space, so you can help us and restore us, so we can be contagious with your goodness and love. Remove from us the pain and the hurt, the anxiety and the fears and the perpetual fatigue, places where even our own self-esteem and faith can be challenged. Come into those private of private places. Take our fever away, so we can minister in power. As for me, help me recognize the comfort zone I’ve kept you out of, and help me get out of this feverish mess I’ve gotten myself into. Help me invite you in to my self-imposed comfort zone. Help me give you room to work. Forgive me for giving you room to work only in the public sphere of my life. I want to invite you inward, beyond my inward comfort zones. In your name I pray. Amen.

In just a moment, we’re going to bring our offerings forward to the altar, including for many of us, our commitment cards to GGRTW. If you’d take the card out now... You may be new and committing to say “I’m crossing the line” and giving God room to work. Or you may simply want to write “reaffirm” on your card. Or your circumstances may have changed, and you may need to adjust or step up your commitment. We invite you to take time now to fill out your card, and bring it up as a part of our offering this morning. *I am indebted to Grace Imathiu who has taught on this subject with material I have found extremely helpful.*