

“The Monster Under Megan’s Bed”

Mark 2:1-12

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Associate Pastor Robin Gilshire

Chilson Hills Church, Brighton, Michigan

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Have you ever been so scared by a life situation that you have been paralyzed? You know, so intimidated by what might happen or is happening that you're afraid to make a move. Asking someone to marry you; putting off taking that notoriously difficult class; choosing a new career path; or, perhaps, welcoming a new pastor. What's it like when instead of focusing on all the scary reasons we think of to be paralyzed by life, we choose to trust Jesus and believe in all the reason we have to live life fully?

*Last thing I remember is the freezing cold
Depression reaching up just to swallow me whole
Ice in my memory showing where I've been
Shock to my spirit as I tumble in
My present and my future were lost at sea
I alone have returned to tell thee*

*Living in ice for eternity
I walk the world again
Lord had mercy on a frozen man*

*Next words that were spoken to me
Chilson asked me what my name might be
They were lookin' like me, and cradled my head
I said, "Angels of mercy am I alive or am I dead?
My name is William James McPhee
I was born in 1953
Raised in Michigan by the seas
But that ain't who I am
Lord have mercy on a frozen man*

*It took a lot of patience to heal my heart
To free my guilt and dry my eyes
Jesus calls me, "State of the art."
And the children, when they see me, smile*

*I thought it would help just to visit my grave
See what kind of tombstone I had made
Saw some friends and some family and it seems so strange
Some of them stiff and cold from extreme old ways
See here, when I froze I thought, "Sure, I'm gone!"
But Christ still had something to work on
You can raise you arm, you can wiggle you hand
And you can wave, "Hello" to a thawed-out man*

*I know what it means to freeze to death
To lose a little life with every breath
To say good-bye to God on earth
And come around again
Lord had mercy on a frozen man*

If the story I have for you is going to work this morning, you need to remember three axioms of my father, the late Co. William Shira:

- “Don't go fishing if you can't get wet;”
- “Even Mozart used an eraser;” and,
- “Death is only the set-up for resurrection.”

Meet a young lady named Megan, who, when she was 5 years old, figured out how to transition well. Like many kids her age for generations before her, Megan was terrified of the monster that lived under her bed. You can understand that, right? Sure, it amounts to being scared of the unknown; terrified of what is beyond your control. **Perhaps it's as simple as being afraid of change.**

We'd best understand the monster under the bed. The "monster" is the source of all those fears that paralyze us, and seduce us to thinking we can't cope. The monster is that which separates us from God, or in today's case, what could separate us from God's intentions for this church; the monster is sin. Let's identify the monster:

Song, "*Sin's Always An Option To Me*," Angela Miller, Lori Juengel

Adapted from "She's Always A Woman To Me," by Billy Joel

*Sin can kill with a smile. Sin can wound with your eyes.
Sin can ruin your faith with its casual lies.
And it only reveals what it wants you to see.
Sin hides like a hope but it's always an option to me.*

*Sin can lead you to love, then can take you or leave you.
Sin can ask for the truth but will never believe you.
Sin will take what you give it as long as it's free.
Yeah, sin steals like a thief but it's always an option to me.
Oh, sin takes of itself, it can wait if it wants, Sin's ahead of its time.
Oh, sin never gives out and it never gives in,
Sin just changes your mind.*

*Sin will promise you more than the garden of Eden.
Then it will cut you and laugh while you're bleedin'.
But it brings out the best and the worst you can be.
Blame it all on yourself cause sin's always an option for me.*

*Sin is frequently kind and it's suddenly cruel.
Sin will do as it pleases sin's nobody's fool.
But it can't be convicted it's earned it's degree.
And the most sin will do is throw shadows at you
But sin's always an option to me.*

Unlike any previous generation before her, Megan did something about the monster under her bed. Meg sat down at her computer and used a software package for children to tell her story about how scary the monster living under her bed was, about how she wanted it to go away, and about how she solved her problem...*she put the monster under her brother's bed*. She included in her story pictures of herself, her bed, her brother, her brother's bed and, of course, the monster. These were pictures she drew on her computer.

When she was finished with her storybook, she decided to share it with some of her friends. You see, Megan has friends all over the world, whom she communicates with all the time...friends Megan has never seen. So she sent her storybook through the Internet where kids around the globe could read and hear her story. The story was picked up by a multi-media magazine and published. Two of the most respected business consultants of the time (this was in 1994),

Stan Davis and Jim Botkin, ran across it through software they had programmed to prowl the Internet for "items of interest."

When these guys found it, they couldn't stop watching it. Listen to what they said about Megan's work: "We watched it five times. Here was a five-year-old child who had accomplished all the major tasks of moviemaking. She was the star, wrote the screenplay, created the visuals, did the editing, was producer and director, and even did her own distribution. **Her learning was integrated into the realities of her life...**and to her, it was all fun!"

Producing and directing a knowledge-based transition in the course of one's life, how did Megan do it!? Well, to begin with, it's fair to say that children are naturally fearless, fun-loving and full of curiosity. These traits encourage them to use all the resources available to them, such as, pick up the remote control and start messing with the "Menu" button. Those same traits keep the Megans of the world clicking away at the mouse, moving from screen to screen, as they "feel" their way through a new computer game.

Have you ever had to "feel" your way through something new; something different; the controls on the dashboard of a new car; or, perhaps, other changes such as menopause or kids moving out of the "nest", or your spouse choosing to go back to school or get a different job at age 50, or the church getting a new pastor? The ease with which even the youngest children seem to pick up and master the most advanced technological gadgetry suggests that these "mks" (millennial kids) may be developing in the human species a kind of automatic change-intuition. The way kids of my generation instinctively knew the fact that one does not spit into the wind, these kids instinctively know how to work the rapid schedule of change encouraged by the microchip. Indeed, today's children have been known to guide the way for us adults, more accustomed to slower speeds of change, who lumber alongside them in the 21-C culture of the third millennium.

Speaking of the way kids are instinctive, have you seen the way the kids of this church have taken to D.J.? You know...the guy who offers children's sermons wearing a Chicago Bear hat?

Oh, yeah, about the new pastor guy, D.J. It's actually fun discovering how spiritually-aware, genuinely caring and lovable this basketball player is. What is the quality of character of the guy who solves the problem of that monster under the bed:

Song: "Something In The Way He Moves,"

Robin

Adapted from, "Something In The Way She Moves," by James Taylor

*There's something in the way he moves
Or looks my way or calls my name
That seems to leave this troubled world behind
And if I'm feeling down and blue
Or troubled by some foolish game
He always seems to make me change my mind*

Chorus:

*And I feel fine any time he's around me
He's around me now, almost all the time
And if I'm well you can tell he's been with me, now
He's been with me, no, quite a long, long time
And I feel fine*

*Every now and then the things I lean on lose their meaning
And I find myself careening in the places where I should not
let me go*

*He has the power to go where no one else can find me
And silently remind me of the happiness and good times
that I know*

*I love the thing he's got to say; and how he thinks and
where he's been*

To me the words are nice the way they sound

I love to hear them best that way

How it matters what they mean

He says them mostly just to calm me down...

Chorus

In John's story of the feeding of the five-thousand, there is one person whose vision and faith go rather unsung by John. As the disciples are worrying about Jesus' asking: "Where can we buy enough food to feed all these people?"

Being disciples, that is, "students" of Jesus yourselves, you guys know how easy it is to worry; particularly over things that appear out of control. "Feeding 5,000+ people (they didn't count the women and children)!? Egad!" "Having a different basketball player as pastor of Chilson? Gad-zooks!" Anyway, Jesus original disciples are stripping their gears over trying to feed a whole lot of people when one simple, rather gentle solution steps up. A child, a fellow who's new to these disciples, offers as an answer to the food question a new possibility; five barley loaves and two fish. **With childlike trust, the lad offers all that he has to Jesus and his disciples.** No wonder Jesus was quoted as saying, "Let the children come to me..."

Andrew, at least, has enough presence of mind (and maybe a small flicker of hope) to offer these rather genuine, trust-of-a-child offered, gifts to Jesus. But his hard-nosed adult rationality gets in the way, for even as Andrew offers the loaves and fish with one hand, he pulls them back with a defeatist babbling: "But these will certainly not be enough for all these people" cynical dismissal. I often wonder when I read this story in John if, when Jesus was given the gift of the loaves and fish, his first thought was, "Wow! Just look at all we have to work with!" As far as I can tell from reading scripture, Jesus really gets excited when people take him up on his ideas.

I say that because apparently Jesus liked the young lad's solution. He uses the child's gift to feed the people. While the story in John's Gospel does not say that the child had faith in Jesus' ability to create a miracle, this child's heartfelt gift does indicate that his **vision and hope were not limited by the all-to-knowable history of the day.** What I mean is that the little guy with the food offering **didn't only trust the places he had been or the things he had learned so far** in his short life. This little guy saw possibilities, not puniness, in those loaves and fish. The child taught the disciples a really important lesson: **They had best be looking for ways to succeed, not for excuses to fail.** In the words of the late John Belushi (*Saturday Night Live* and *Animal House*): "Nothing is impossible for the person who will not listen to reason." Or, as D.J. Reed put in the sermon, *Uncommon Sense*, "Bless you heart; the message of the cross is foolishness, boneheaded, illogical."

Of course, the young child did not have the power to multiply the loaves and fish. **Sometimes, as disciples, when we're focused on the preservation of the past rather than the possibilities of the present, we can heap unrealistic expectations on some people.** What the young lad's gift did do was open a way for Jesus and his disciples to achieve their goals. You know, when you think about it that sounds like a pastor's job description: opening ways for Jesus' disciples, that is, us, the church, to accomplish their...what?...to best accomplish ourselves; to become fully human in Christ.

What if Andrew had turned the boy with the small food offering away; dismissing his gift as worthless and impossible? What if he had avoided the new relationship, the new possibility presented to his life? I wonder where Jesus would have obtained the raw material for this feeding miracle if not he and the disciples had opened up to this unlikely, unknown, new source of rescue?

People with new and different perspectives on life, like children, and Chicago-born new pastors can guide us into serving Christ, if we are open to them and treat their presence and input with the dignity, respect and importance they deserve. **Jesus railed angrily against anyone who would erect a “stumbling block” before the “little ones.” Jesus knew that the future of the world lies in applied faith.**

There was the three-year-old daughter of a young married couple who would ask time and time again if she could be left alone with her new baby brother. All too aware of sibling rivalry, the parents of these two kids consulted a child therapist. Should they give permission for their daughter's request?

After being assured that the little girl was indeed a well-adjusted child, the therapist indicated that it would be fine to give her the chance to be alone with her brother. The suggestion was made to the parents that they may want to listen to the meeting on the nursery intercom just in case of any difficulty.

The Mom and Dad heard their daughter close the door to her brother's room and walk over to the crib. After a moment, they heard her ask him, “Baby, baby, tell me about God. I think I'm forgetting.” (Steven Levine and Ondrea Livine, *Embracing the Beloved*, New York: Doubleday, 1995).

The story form John asks us to tiptoe back into the nursery of our faith, and our personal and shared histories at Chilson, and ask our future to “tell us about God”...to remind us what really is important for life and faith in our world now, today, and the world tomorrow. Remember what Amos said in his Old Testament book? “I raised up some of your children to be prophets” (**Amos 2:11**). (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=amos+2:11) **It's time to sit at the feet of our future.**

The folks of the present and the future interact with computing technology and now think like the computer programs think; the brains of this and the succeeding generations have their brains wired more efficiently than those who remember the Beatles when they were new. It is common, now-days, to be able to think on many different levels all at once, to see multiple tasks and interrelated processes, and visualize solutions that lie many steps ahead on the path. These are contemporary visions I, for one, must sit at the younger person's feet to learn. The old stand-by “one-step-at-a-time,” “one-problem-at-a-time” way of dealing with the world simply doesn't cut it anymore. A lot of us need to sit at the feet of the present and future; there he sits.

Then there's the “use-it-once-then-throw-it-away” mentality that likes to saturate our mindset and has resulted in a kind of global holocaust. Oh, we have become aware and begun to be concerned about the condition of this planet and the quality of the living space we will leave our children in the future. But some of us who have been around a while can be a lot like Andrew. When solutions or sacrifices are raised, we wring our hands and moan, “What are we among so many?” We can be so puny-minded that we can refuse to sacrifice what we know and are so unwilling to lose that we impede or deny the future. It's sort of like when I tried to diet and unsuccessfully lose weight all those many times. I was too gutless to make the necessary life-style changes to improve my own health. Oh, yeah...blood pressure off the charts, “Done-lopp's disease over my belt, I'd see a pizza (wasn't supposed to have pizza anymore), and say, “Well one slice will be okay; at least I'm not eating the whole thing.” It took my young son to get me out of the presumed safety of my denial. He looked me straight in the face and said, “Dad, I love every chin on your face.”

Like the young man who shared his fish and bread lunch with Jesus, **the new pastor and the people of Chilson Hills Church who are the present and the future see what they can do instead of fearing the overwhelming nature of what must be done.** Those of us who want only to remember need to sit at their feet and learn that!

The people of the present and the future, folks like D.J., never had the luxury of taking their evolving natural world and the creatures in it, or the evolving journey of Chilson Hills church and the people in it, for granted. Honest-to-God leaders like our D.J. carry a sense of the fragility of this life and their own responsibility for its well-being deep in their souls.

It's time to sit at the feet of our future.

The comments of the Pulpit Committee inspired me on this one. When a church steps off into its future it really needs to realize the connectedness and interdependence all people share with one another.

Before giving thanks for the bread, Jesus instructs the whole milling crowd to “sit down” together. Only when the 5000-strong sat down as one great family were they able to pass the loaves from hand to hand to hand until all were fed.

What do you think? When the people first looked at the five loaves and two fish that Jesus was blessing, did anyone in that crowd really think they had come together for any real purpose? Maybe they did; they did know of Jesus' healings. **All John's story tells is that those who had enough faith to “sit down” at the feet of their future received all they could possibly want from Jesus' hands and heart.**

When to their “surprise” the Pulpit Committee discovered over the course of their search for the next pastor how “unique” and special a church Chilson Hills is, how, as a people of Christ, we're not “normal,” their unanimous selection of our next spiritual leader became even more understandable. Chilson is a church the theologian, Paul Tillich, would call

“traditional,” that is keeping the traditions of the church and applying them, along with a lot of learning, to the present and future situations. That’s not a normal approach to being a church. What is normal in being a church is what Professor Tillich would define as “conventional.”

You see, tradition is dynamic; it grows, it learns. Tradition uses what it already knows and then develops that positive energy by adapting to ever-changing life. It’s a lot like resurrection; what is thought of as dead, rises again brand new!

Conventional wisdom is not dynamic; on the contrary, it is static by definition. Unlike tradition, convention is defensible. The borders of its comfort zone are the walls of a fortress. Convention does not adapt to life through learning, convention expects life to adapt to it.

Chilson Hills is not a conventional church. As a people of Christ, you don’t see generations of animosity or hatred or disappointments demanding everybody has to think and believe the same. You see common needs, common desires, common hungers. What you do well, what you’re really good at, what makes you genuine peacemakers is your marvelous ability to sit at the feet of your new, pastor, learning from him, and still resisting the urge to stop and defend where you are. You see, in conventional churches the folk are responsibility-shy; they abdicate their accountability to the seven last words of the church: “But we’ve always done things this way.” These folks are too afraid of losing what they think they have. In a traditional church, such as Chilson, the folk welcome responsibility and hold themselves accountable for continually learning how to be better disciples and feeders of people for the Christ. Such believers know they have they Christ and therefore have nothing to lose and The Way and Life to gain!

I believe this life-creating approach to worshiping Christ comes from a well-trusted relationship with David, the original pastor of Chilson; who, himself, never fully grew up. Oh, there are definite signs of adult maturity, such as his refusing to “shovel” snow, insisting on a snow-thrower instead. But the facts are obvious; the facts that he purchased a sports car and has needed the aid of a live-in first-grade teacher for all these years are proof positive the guy likes life!

But remember I said the life-creating approach of this church comes from a well-trusted relationship. The pastor is not all there is to Chilson by a long shot. You folks *are* this church. Which is why I believe you empowered your Pulpit Committee to go out and find the leader you could also trust in relationship; and guess what, although D.J., like you, welcomes responsibility and accountability, I believe he ain’t gonna grow up all the way either.

So this is how Chilson’s future is going to work from the point of view of someone well seasoned in transitions:

-Just as we need the freshness of D.J.’s insights, he needs to hear the wisdom of our experience.

-Just as D.J. needs to hear our concern for the plight of the world, we need to hear his concern for our hearing the voice of our souls.

-Just as we need D.J. to understand each of our own individual needs, we need him to help us understand our similarities.

Let’s not give the monsters under our beds to our future. The monsters of convention and fear that insist we just might be losing something. Instead, let us sit at the feet of our future and learn all about our possibilities in Christ.

Those two guys on the Emmaus road were sure feeling sad. All hung-down and brung-down because they thought Jesus was gone and all that they had known was lost and life would never, never be fun again. Notice, please, they were so full of their own anger, fear and self-pity, so completely ignoring any possibilities of the future, they couldn’t even recognize Jesus when he appears in their lives. When Jesus learns what’s on their minds and hearts, he says what may be the most instructive and valuable words in Scripture: “How foolish you are!”

Just what do these two guys admit to each other when they finally give themselves the chance to sit with Jesus at the feet of their future? As I remember, they say something like, “Wasn’t it like a fire burning in our hearts when he spoke to us on the road?”

We need to sit at the feet of our future.

Song: “Country Road,”

Lori, Matt, Nick, Sean, Robin

By James Taylor

*Take to the highway won't you lend me your name
Your way and my way seem to be one and the same
Momma don't understand it, she wants to know where I've been
I have to be some kind of natural-born fool to want to walk that
Way again*

But you know I can feel it, on the Emmaus Road

*Sail on home to Jesus won't you good girls and boys
I've been in pieces, you can have your own choice
But I can see a band full of angels coming to set me free
Oh, don't know nothin' 'bout the why or when
But I can tell you that it's bound to be
Just because I can feel it, on Emmaus Road*

*I recon my feet know where they want me to go
Walkin' on Emmaus Road*

Statement Of Faith of the United Church of Canada

All: We are not alone, we live in God's world
We believe in God:
 who has created and is creating, who has come in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh,
 to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by the Spirit.
We trust in God.
We are called to be the church:
 to celebrate God's presence, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil,
 to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, out judge and our hope.
In life, in death, and in life beyond death,
 God is with us. We are not alone.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

Hymn: *"It's In Every One Of Us,"* All Musicians and Congregation

Chorus:

***It's in every one of us, to be wise
Find your heart, open up both your eyes
We can all know everything without ever knowing why
It's in every one of us, by and by***

*It's in everyone of us, I just remembered
It's like I've been sleeping for years
I'm not awake as I can be, but my seeing is better
I can see (I can see), Through the tears (through the tears)
I been realizing that I bought this ticket
And watched only half of the show
But there's scenery and lights, and a cast of thousands
Who all know (who all know), what I know (what I know)
And it's good (and it's good), THAT IT'S SO... **Chorus***

We understand the monster, we understand D.J.'s ministry, that is, the solution to the monster, finally, let's understand who, working for Christ, got us this far. Let me bless you singing about David.

Song: "You Can Close Your Eyes," by James Taylor

*Well, the sun is surely sinking down
But the moon is slowly rising
So, this old world must still be spinning 'round
And I still love you*

Chorus: *So, close your eyes
 You can close you eyes, it's alright
 All I know are love songs
 And I can't sing the blues anymore
 But I can sing this song;
 You can sing this song when I'm gone*

*It won't be long before another day
We gonna have a good time
And no one's gonna take that time away
You can stay as long as you like...Chorus*