

## Meditation 1 – Find Adventure on the River

Have any of you ever been whitewater rafting? I've been a number of times, usually with a youth group or on the "fun" day of a mission trip. I've been on several different rivers, but even when you raft the same river at different times, it's never quite the same. Depending on the weather conditions, the water level and who you are with, it's a different adventure every time you're on the river.

Yet each one of those rafting adventures starts the same way. You put on your life jacket, you grab a paddle, and you and your raft-mates grab a handle on the raft, take it down to the water and one by one, you step in and find your place. Then you push off from the shore, and you're on your way on an exciting adventure that will be full of surprises!

That's the way it happened for Jesus' disciples when he called them. There they were, calmly going about everyday tasks of fishing and mending nets, when Jesus came and asked them to drop everything and go on an adventure with him. Their lives after that were never the same. They became "fishers of people", following Jesus, learning from him, doing the work of God's kingdom, and in the years after Jesus' resurrection, being led all over the world by the Holy Spirit to share the good news. It was a great adventure, not without its difficult and trying times, not without dangers, but there were also wondrous and unexpected surprises, incredible experiences and people they would never forget that they found along the way. Whatever else it was, life with Jesus was never boring!

And so it is for us, if we are willing to step out of our everyday routines in answer to Jesus' call. The Holy Spirit sweeps us off our feet and into the current of God's work in the world as we share the good news, reach out with God's love and act in answer God's call. You end up in strange places, not just a quiet church service on a Sunday morning, but serving in a soup kitchen or a homeless shelter, making friends with someone of a totally different race or

background who also knows that Jesus is Lord, trying to find answers for middle schoolers who are questioning their faith, or sitting at a table at a coffeehouse surrounded by people of a wide variety of abilities and knowing that you are at home. This life of faith isn't always easy. There are moments of dangerous rapids where we fear we may go aground, but there are also moments of exhilaration and joy that you would never have known if you stayed watching on the riverbank. Life is an adventure with God!

## MEDITATION 2 – Acceptance

One of the things that is both comforting and challenging about rafting is that you can't do it alone. Those rafts are built for a crew, not a single person. So it's comforting because you know – or at least you hope – there will be other people backing you up. It's challenging because everyone has a different approach to rafting and you still have to work together as a team.

This is a picture from a long – ago trip down the Lehigh River that I found in my office at home a few weeks ago that helps you see what I mean. And, no, I'm not in this raft, so don't try to figure out which one is me. This is my daughter Laura's raft – she's the second one back on the left side. What I want you to notice in this picture, though, is the differences among the rafters. Each of these people has a different role in the raft, and a different attitude. But if they don't work together, disaster will happen, as someone pops out of the raft into the river or the whole raft overturns.

What truly makes a raft crew work is when everyone knows each others' strengths but also their weaknesses and puts them in the right place in the raft to be most effective. In this raft, Claire and Katy, in the front, have their teeth gritted and are digging in. They are in the lead because because they are strong and determined. Laura, grinning and ready for adventure as she is, is small and not as strong as the two in the front, but she is still ready and able to contribute. Kevin, in the back, is the biggest and tallest. He can see where

they're going so he can steer and drive the raft with a burst of power. Sarah, looking uncertain and a little afraid is seated in front of him, where she can be encouraged and where Kevin can grab her fast if she starts to pop out.

That's how a raft crew works. That's how a church works at its best. Each person is recognized for who they are and accepted for who they are and given a role to play that fits their personality and their abilities. And that's how God sees each of us, just as we are, and values and loves us with all our differences just as we are. We find acceptance on the river.

### MEDITATION 3 – Joy

There is adventure on the river, but there's also danger. The rapids get rough, the rocks grind those who are careless enough to come in their way, the swirling waters can suck you down. Why then would anyone adventure out on the river, whether it's the rafter's mountain river or the river of faith?

The answer is for the joy – for being part of the beauty and wonder of the earth, for the sheer exhilaration of the adventure, for taking a risk and meeting the challenge and coming through, for the companionship of friends, for the sheer glory of the adventure. It's easy to see these things when you're on the mountain river, laughing as you paddle through the rapids. It's easier to lose track of the joy on the river of faith.

Yet the Bible is full of joy – the psalms dance with it, inviting us to make joyful noise to the Lord, people in Jesus' stories who find what they have lost throw parties to celebrate, people like Zacchaeus and Paul are willing to turn their lives upside down simply because of the joy they find in Jesus.

Joy is more than simply happiness. It starts deep down in your soul with a sense of well-being, then bubbles up in a smile, and in laughter. It is rooted in Jesus' love and it spreads to everyone around. Find joy on the river!

#### MEDITATION 4 – Rest

Sometimes after you have spent all your energy and adrenaline making it through the rapids, the river widens and smooths out and there is a long, deep drift. You can stop paddling for a few minutes and let the water carry you, resting on its current. You lie back in the raft and enjoy the sun, or you dive into the water and swim along side. In these moments, there is rest from what has been and a chance to prepare for what is still coming. You dwell only in the present and rest on the water.

Coming to God in prayer is like those moments of rest on the water. For the moment, if only for the moment, you come into God's presence, knowing you are safe, knowing you will be carried. You rest in God, trusting in the one who made you and who loves you best. We find rest on the river.

#### MEDITATION 5 – Peace

The absolute worst rafting trip I ever went on was not one where there were plunging, dangerous rapids that threatened to overwhelm us at every turn, nor was it one where we were bored and tired from paddling as we floated on a river that not only had no rapids, it didn't even have much current. No, the worst rafting trip was one when I was on an unfamiliar river with a bunch of middle school girls and there was no guide in the boat. Because there was no guide in the boat, I was the one who was in charge, with no knowledge and not much strength. I had to keep those girls in the boat and headed down the river. Most of them were fine. One was not. She was timid and afraid. She would not put a paddle in the water. And she was big, bigger than I was. Every time the boat went over a ripple or around a rock, she would bounce up. I was behind her, and I'd grab her to keep her in the boat. As I grabbed, I'd pull her back in and I'd bounce out. I spent more time in the river than on the river that trip. By

the end I was drained and exhausted. I had learned my lesson. You need a guide on the river.

At least as much as you need a guide on the river, you need a guide in life. Someone who will be with you through the worst of life's rapids, telling you when to dig in with your paddle, when to lay off and let the current take you, someone who will watch out for you when you can't watch out for yourself. Jesus promised his disciples that he would continue to be there with them, continue to be their guide, even if they couldn't see him. "I will be with you always," he promised them, and that promise is good for us as well. "I will be with you always."

Because Jesus is with us always, we can have peace. This is not just a peace that means you're not fighting with each other. It's a peace that reaches way down into the depths of your heart because you are free of fear, because you know you are loved and accepted, because you are ready for the adventure to which God's calls you because you know it is God who is calling. Our Rafting Ready verse this week reminded us that "when you pass through the waters, I will be with you." And Jesus' last words to our disciples echo in our ears: "I will be with you always." Because of that, we can have peace. There is peace on the river.