



Christ on the Frontier

TEXT
Matthew 28:16-20

March 4, 2018 — Sermon by Rev. Dr. Brandon Frick

Village on Mission, I bring you greetings from your brothers and sisters at Village on Antioch. Village on Antioch, good morning from Village on Mission. Y'all let me know if Dr. Nishioka nods off during this.

Friends, what a joy it is to be together today, doing this one church in two locations thing. My wife Aaryn, our sons Levi and Nathan, and I have been here now for a little over a month, and it has been humbling how we've been received by the entire Village family, so thank you for the warm welcome. In that time, a lot has happened at Village on Antioch. We've thanked Rev. Hallie Hottle for her service, had a reception with cake and bouncy balls (probably the highlight for my kids), and I've been officially received by the Presbytery. Sunday has not been deterred by some crummy weather, so we're worshipping and settling into a new ministry together.

And, on a personal note, I'd like to report that at last count there are only seven boxes left to unpack in our home. In just 13 years of marriage, this is

the fifth time Aaryn and I have unpacked in a new state, and I'm pretty impressed with that turnaround.

With every place we've ever lived, I've noticed that there are certain things about each place that are a big deal to newcomers like us, but go without fanfare by the locals. In Princeton, New Jersey, people walked past the home of Albert Einstein every day — theory of relativity Einstein — and no one seemed to care.

Pasadena, Maryland, is just 45 minutes away from the National Mall, the Smithsonian museums and the monuments — and no one was overly excited.

In Florida, everyone just assumed you should be able to celebrate Christmas in flip-flops.

In Texas, the thing we thought was amazing that locals took absolutely no pride in was ... nothing ... *absolutely nothing* ... because Texans, God bless their hearts, are certain that everything is bigger and better in Texas, and that includes Texans' sense of state pride.

Now before the Texans among us are tempted to storm out, let me confess that as a

South Carolinian, I carry an equally strong sense of pride in my state. So, when I was in Texas and people would say "Remember the Alamo," I would say "Yes! Let us *never* forget the Alamo, in which South Carolinian William Barrett Travis valiantly and brilliantly told a bunch of Texans what to do, and they accomplished their mission." Ah, those were fun years.

Since arriving in Kansas, there are a couple of things the locals take for granted that I'm pretty excited about. Now this first one, if they find out about this in South Carolina, they won't let me back in; so don't get me exiled, OK? But I gotta say it: The barbecue here is awesome, and everyone I talk to is like "Yeah, it's pretty good." Pretty good? I could eat cold brisket for breakfast. Y'all don't take that for granted!

The second thing no one seems too excited about are all these brown signs around town that mark the major trail frontier routes, like the Oregon and Santa Fe trails. It is incredible for me to think that just a couple hundred years ago, there were pioneers in covered wagons following these trails all around us into unknown

lands, pushing out into the frontier.

That is awesome! And most of you just drive past them every day without noticing. Y'all gotta remember, my ancestor Johann Thomas Frick got off that ship from Germany to South Carolina 250 years ago. He was like "Y'all go on, I'm good right here."

This whole frontier thing is just amazing to me, and I don't just mean living in a place where these trails crisscrossed. I'm talking about the frontier that we — Village on Mission and Village on Antioch — are on right now together.

If I understand today's text correctly, the call those first disciples received — the call that has echoed throughout the church universal for the last two thousand years, and which now, Village Church is responding to — is to meet Christ on the frontier, on the edge of the known and unknown, to undertake a task both holy and new. That's the frontier on which I see Village on Mission and Village on Antioch.

Our gospel reading for today comes from the 28th chapter of Matthew, and there we see the frontier of a world transformed and renewed by the power of the resurrection. But if you look just a chapter or two before our gospel reading, there's no way you'd think we'd end up here. After Jesus' arrest, the disciples, the men at least, are apparently so shaken up by that event that they disappear from the story entirely. I mean there's *not a word* about

the remaining 11 disciples after Jesus' arrest. They are in the wind, and while that's not necessarily what we'd want to happen, I think we'd be wise not to beat them up too badly for it.

I might be saying this because I am a man, and every winter I get what my wife calls "man-colds," which according to her are harmless little viruses I treat like biblical plagues. I don't want to get into who's right and who's wrong, especially because she's at Antioch this morning. I will simply point out that it is a historical fact that first symptom of bubonic plague was fatigue, so I'd like to think of myself as cautiously informed.

Regardless, I really do get why the disciples would want to disappear after their friend, their Rabbi who shaped their hopes for the future, not only died, but died on a cross for the world to see. When things have gone wrong, I mean really wrong: You want to grieve privately.

You're afraid you might be next.

You maybe feel a little ashamed that you invested all your hopes and dreams in a now-shattered delusion.

I'd hide too. I'd tend to my wounds and try to envision a very different, *and very bitter*, future. *Because when your world caves in under the weight of the cross, it is hard to breathe, much less to dig your way out.*

Thankfully they weren't alone. They were helped by

other disciples, women who encountered Jesus at the empty tomb, and who brought them an unexpected message to meet him on a mountain in Galilee. Far from dead and gone as they had feared, Jesus had returned from the frontier between life and death, and was now calling them to meet him on another.

So they go forward to meet Jesus, unsure of what they will find. When they get there, they encounter Jesus Christ, risen from the grave, and all of them worship him, even as some doubt. Now for any of us who believe that we are oh-so-different from these disciples, separated from them by time and space as we are, take this in: With the Risen Christ standing before them, there were some who doubted as they worshipped.

Does that sound like anyone you know? Like yourself? I know I've been there, and this story is a source of great comfort to me — because the ones who doubt, with the Risen Christ literally right before their eyes, aren't asked to leave. After they get up off their knees, every single one of them is given the same commission: *Go, make disciples, baptize and teach.* He tasks them to do a *new thing*, and this Risen Christ who moves from one frontier to the next, calls them, even those uncertain of what's happening — maybe *especially* those who are uncertain — to do these things in the unknown lands of "all nations."

Let's just appreciate this for a moment: Jesus, risen from the

dead, has just commissioned a bunch of man-cold having fishermen who have never left Galilee, some of them filled with doubt, to disperse throughout the known world to share the good news. Now if he were just sending them out by themselves, I'd have some concerns about this strategy. But they're not going to be alone. This new frontier, where they will fulfill this holy work, this Great Commission, is also where they'll join Jesus Christ — always out front, blazing a trail ahead of them until the end of the age.

So, where is this frontier? There are lots of frontiers, lots of places where Jesus continues to call disciples to do a new thing. In Matthew's gospel, the frontier is where *the darkness of the tomb* meets *the first light of a new day*, where the *threat of death* is conquered by *the promise of new life*. It's where the known and the unknown converge into a horizon where there is God-given work to be done.

As best as I can tell, that's the frontier we're on in our life together as Village Presbyterian Church. At 148th and Antioch, where the weight of crucifixion could have crushed everyone and everything, and where some were certain it would, the Risen Christ has instead claimed it in the power of resurrection, as a frontier from which we can go, baptize, teach and make disciples. And by "make disciples" we don't just mean evangelizing, though that's part of it. Mak-

ing disciples is about nurturing and forming generations of disciples and their communities through worship, study, outreach and prayer. It takes a lot of coffee for that many fellowship hours, gallons of glue for VBS and plenty of binders for our committee work (we are Presbyterian, after all).

It takes a lot to make disciples. So, I give thanks.

That the disciples of Jesus Christ at the Presbyterian Church of Stanley and the disciples at Village Presbyterian Church responded to Christ's call to meet him in this holy work, and have now given us the place *in* which and *from* which, we can fully live into that calling.

Because a whole lot of disciples met him on the frontier in reverence, and some in doubt, we've got a place where we can welcome *all* of God's children to the full life of the church — a place from which we can take care of our neighbors in need; a place from which we can meet Christ in holy work that we haven't even dared to imagine ... yet.

You remember those brown trail signs I was talking about at the beginning? I noticed my first one just a few weeks ago on my morning commute, right on the corner of Antioch and 150th, with the large wooden cross on the side of Village on Antioch right behind it. I mean, y'all, this sermon just writes itself. There were people pushing out on the frontier right there beside the church. And we get to do something

similar following the promise of new life that Jesus makes on the edge of the known and unknown.

Now I don't want to romanticize this too much. I mean, just a few days ago, I saw one of these brown trail signs in front of a Taco Bell, so take that for what it's worth.

This Great Commission, Christ on the frontier work, is not easy or glamorous. Like those first disciples, there is much that will bring us to our knees, amazed by what we are witnessing. But there's also gonna be some doubt and some uncertainty about what is happening in the moment and how exactly it's gonna shake out in the future. The Presbyterian way of doing all things decently and in order is hard out on the frontier.

On my office wall, you'll find a large 1859 map of Kansas. Molly Ramsey, our ministry assistant at VOA, tells me it's a Public Land Survey System map. I don't fully understand what that means, but the map shows Kansas, with about the eastern third mapped out with county names and major cities, but west of that, it's just the rivers that are named. It's a reminder to me that while what we know now is by no means insignificant, there's a lot more to learn and a lot more frontier to cross.

There are no doubt hard miles ahead of us. There will be times we come to a fork in the road and have to do our best to figure out the right path. Sometimes we won't.

And sometimes, we'll have to make our own path. And those moments can be scary. And like those 11 disciples we read about today, that fear can tempt us to hide away in the places we know — even if they have caved in under the weight of the hopelessness that comes with the cross.

But that's not our call. When those moments come, we have to remember that we are a resurrection people, commissioned to meet Christ on the frontier. We have to remember that we've already ventured into some unknown territory. I mean heck, we invented the term "site pastor." No one outside of Village has the foggiest idea of what that means. Really, if you have friends who are "Presbyterian polity wonks" (and really, who doesn't?), don't talk about a site pastor. It just won't compute. It's like telling them there's a wocket in their pocket, or a nink in the sink, or a Texan with true humility about their state.

We've already mapped out some of this, and that's important to remember. More important is that we keep worshipping alongside of one another, because that's what preceded Christ's commissioning of the disciples.

But most important is that when we are tempted to hide, afraid that we are all alone in this, we have to remember: We are *never* called to a place where Christ is not already at work, out in front, calling us to join him in this life-giving commission. If we can remem-

ber and hope these things, we are going to get to the right place, and we're going to get there by the right paths.

It's that sure and certain knowledge that led a native South Carolinian to Kansas to a call that more polity-minded Presbyterians just cannot understand. It's that sure and certain knowledge that led to the formation of Village on Antioch by disciples who responded to Christ's call. And it's that sure and certain knowledge that will continue to lead us forward into to new horizons, into new and holy work, and into new life for us and our neighbors. Village Church, let us continue, with all that we are and all that we have, to meet Christ on the frontier.

Now, to the one who always meets us on the edge of the known and unknown and shows us the Way forward, to this one be glory forever and ever. Amen.

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.