

Oregon City United Methodist Church
18955 S. South End Road
Oregon City, OR 97045

Rev. Michael Benischek
503-522-9807
January 10, 2021

Series: Into the Woods
Sermon: Go Big Red!

Matthew 7:13-14 (KJV)

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Proverbs 16:18-20 (MEV)

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.
Better it is to be of a humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud.
He who handles a matter wisely will find good, and whoever trusts in the Lord, happy is he.

Romans 6:23 (MEV)

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sermon

Happy New Year! The time of year where we cast off the old, and embrace the new. And say good riddance to the year we just had. We want something new. Something fresh. We make resolutions to change our bodies. To change our finances. To change our relationships - and that's all well and good and I pray that they all work out for us. But for the next six weeks, I want to focus on the old. Well, at least on some old old stories. You may have heard of the Brother's Grimm - the 1800's duo who catalogued and published most of what we call fairy tales. This series is called "Into the Woods", for that is where most of these stories had their plots. And we here at church didn't feel like putting away our Christmas trees yet, so we have a winter forest scene up here and we just went with it. So our series, Into the Woods, will explore the intersection between fairy tale and faith, stories and scripture and see what lessons we may glean as we create a new 2021 for us all. First up: Little Red Riding Hood.

You remember the story: A girl who wore a red riding cloak, and everyone called her Little Red Riding Hood. And where is she going? Grandmother's house! Into the woods. Mom prepares a basket and warns - "Remember, go straight to Grandma's house," her mother cautioned. "Don't dawdle along the way and please don't talk to strangers! The woods are dangerous."

But when Little Red Riding Hood noticed some lovely flowers in the woods, she forgot her promise to her mother. She picked a few, watched the butterflies flit about for awhile, listened to the frogs croaking and then picked a few more. Suddenly, the wolf appeared beside her. They have their encounter, you heard the story in the Children's time. The wolf takes a short cut and beats her to Grandmother's house. In the original story, the wolf gobbles her up. And then Red shows up and they have their famous exchange: "Grandmother! What big ears you have," said Little Red Riding Hood as she edged closer to the bed. The better to hear you with, my dear," replied the wolf. "But Grandmother! What big eyes you have," said Little Red Riding Hood. "The better to see you with, my dear," replied the wolf. "But Grandmother! What big teeth you have," said Little Red Riding Hood her voice quivering slightly. "The better to eat you with, my dear," And depending on version - He eats Red Riding Hood or a woodsmen comes to her and grandma's rescue and he deposes of the wolf.

Great story. Good night kids, sweet dreams! And we leave the kids terrified about wolves and gobbling up and life lessons about listening to your parents!

Notice that Red Riding Hood was instructed to go straight down the path. It was only as she detoured and was distracted that she put herself in danger. The path was safe. The woods, at least in this story, not so much. And this is where we get to sermonizing and moralizing of the story: How many of us would have stayed safe if we had stayed on path? How many of us would have avoided injury if we had remained on path? Isn't it true that our own disobedience leads us to distraction which we discover later on that is deadly. He orders our steps, but we have to take them! He can show us a path but we have to be willing to stay on it! Your Word is a light unto my path but if I walk out of the light I also walk out of safety.

Even a small detour can be deadly. Stick as close as possible to the path. Don't see how far away you can get! Narrow is the way. Straight is the gate. I remember once reading a sign in the midwest, during the raining season: It read: "Choose your ruts carefully; you'll be in them for the next ten miles." This famous passage is the concluding statement to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The essence of his teaching. And he offers us the choice. Live a life of love and faith, or of hate and folly. Stay on the path!

How far off The Path have you or I gone? Some of us are a long way from the path He told us to take. He said walk in holiness and we are wilding out. He said walk in generosity and we have detoured to stinginess! He said walk in kindness and we are walking in anger. He said walk in humility and now we are on a path of pride! Here's a new year's resolution: Get back on path! Stay on path.

I also learn that it is deadly to repeatedly ignore repeated warnings. Red sees repeated warnings signs that something isn't right. Ignoring the voice, big ears, big eyes results in experiencing the big teeth. She had repeated warning but repeatedly ignored them.

Warning signs must be heeded. You don't suddenly become deceived. You don't suddenly find yourself destroyed. It is usually the result of repeated warnings being ignored. Pride goes to destruction, haughtiness before the fall. I like the words a few verses later: He who handles a matter wisely will find good, and whoever trusts in the Lord, happy is he.

How many annual visits to the doc who tells you about your high blood pressure do you finally do something about it? Or just wait for the stroke and heart attack? How many warning signs do we get in our immediate and closest relationships before we finally acknowledge there is a problem? I have to ask . . . how many of us are ignoring repeated warnings. Warnings from His Word that what you are doing will bring destruction. It is deadly to repeatedly ignore repeated warning signs. Believe the first warning sign! Exit on first glimpse of red flag. Get out on the voice and you won't have to worry about the teeth!

And the last lesson, real quick: Destruction is always corporate! Notice that Red's detour resulted in not only her demise but the demise of her grandmother. Her decision had implications and impact on someone else.

What we do always has corporate implications. If you ignore the warning signs, then the pain produced won't just be felt by you. No one is an island. The reason I want you to stay on the path isn't just so you won't experience pain, but also so that I won't have to feel your pain! Your family won't feel your pain. We are connected. The idea that what I do doesn't impact anyone else is a lie from the wolf! We are a package deal. If you suffer, then I suffer. If you hurt, then I hurt. This is playing out right now, isn't it? Wear a mask. Save lives. Don't want to wear a mask. Well, this isn't about you. It's not about me. It's about us.

There's a reason why this Grimm Fairy tale has had lasting power over centuries, and how it has echoes in our holy writ. Today I want to encourage you to learn from Red. There is a wolf (think evil one) who will steal, kill

and destroy if given the opportunity! Don't give him that opportunity. Stay on the path. Life can give warning signs that we need to heed, and don't forget, we're all in this together, and we never walk alone. And the family of God said, AMEN.

Intro:

Good morning Oregon City United Methodist Church. We are here in 2021, and life looks a whole lot like 2020, but there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Folks are getting a vaccine, our political drama should get a little less complicated, and each day is getting a little brighter. We're not out of the woods yet, as you can see behind me. Our series for the next six months is called, Into the Woods.

Some people go into the woods to hike. Or escape the stresses of our days. Or to find adventure. They are reminders that there are still wild areas in the world. Welcome to the woods of OCUMC, and may we find what we need to find as we play with this metaphor in this season. Here are the announcements of church!

Children's Time:

Hey Kiddo's! For the next few weeks, we will tell a few stories. Yes, we always tell stories in our children's time, but they're usually from the Bible. These are going to be old stories from another tradition - the fairy tales. While not out of our scriptures, they do teach truths that we need to learn. And as a church, we are keepers of traditions, so for a few Sundays, we'll tell a few of the more famous tales. There's some Godly wisdom in these pages. First up: Little Red Riding Hood, or at least, one version of the story.

Prayer:

Heavenly one: We are wanderers, those who arrogantly believe we know the right direction. Whether or not we like it, we have a tendency to be arrogant and stray away from God's love. Sometimes we seek adventure and in some cases, that adventure leads to darkness; fear becomes an enticement. Our television shows promote fear and alienation. Our news papers shriek with stories of horror, injustice, division. Lord, we need your healing presence. Lord, we need your light. We need your healing. We need to rekindle our relationship with you.

As we have lifted in our hearts the names of people near and dear to us who need your healing touch and your tender mercies, we have also lifted ourselves up as people in need of your grace. Our world is in the midst of strife; wars, oppression, famine, hunger, alienation, situations in which we have abused the world and each other. Heal us and this world, Lord. Renew us with your life-giving waters and re-affirm our baptisms as your children. Let us go forth to be people of peace and mercy. For we ask this in Jesus' Name. Thru his prayer...

Offertory:

Welcome to the Offering, our chance to give back. As United Methodists, we support many ministries, within the church, outside the church, at home and abroad. If you ever walk down the hallway at church, you might find the Upper Rooms. Born out of the Methodist Church, The Upper Room is a Christian organization that publishes books and magazines and that produces programs to support the spiritual life of Christians around the world. The Upper Room is best known for The Upper Room daily devotional, which is published in 35 languages and is available in more than 100 countries. The 1 billionth upper room was recently published.

If you ever find yourself in Nashville, you can visit the home office of the Upper Room. They have a chapel with services each Wednesday, which features a nearly life-size woodcarving of Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper. We can share the Upper Room to our Congregation and beyond, because of your continued gifts. If you haven't checked them out yet, pick one up the next time you are in! Your soul will be glad you did.

Closing:

Already filmed on location in the Willamette National Forest.