

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Win the Day – Cut the Rope

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In 1853, America hosted its first World's Fair in New York City. The organizers built an exhibition hall called the Crystal Palace to showcase the latest and greatest inventions. This is where a man named Elisha Otis stole the show by pulling off a stunt for the ages. Otis was the inventor of the elevator safety brake, but he had a hard time selling his idea to safety first skeptics and so here's what he did and I'll show you an artist's rendering. Otis stood on a platform high above the Crystal Palace. He had an ax man positioned above the elevator shaft then he yelled loud enough for everyone in the exhibition hall to hear him, "Cut the rope". The crowd held its collective breath and the elevator fell a few feet. Otis announced, "All is safe ladies and gentlemen, all is safe." The safety brake worked as did the sales pitch. When Elisha Otis cut the rope, there were only a few buildings in New York City taller than five stories. Why? No one wanted to take the stairs. In 1854, Otis installed an elevator in a building on Broadway and the rest is history. By 1908 there were 538 buildings in New York City that qualified as skyscrapers.

Fast forward 100 years, according to the Otis Elevator company, the equivalent of the world's population rides on its elevators every three days. I think it's safe to say that Elisha Otis turned the world upside down. How? There comes a moment when you need to cut the rope. Please hear what I'm about to say... Playing it safe is risky. The greatest risk is taking no risk at all. One, it maintains the status quo. Two, it leads to something that psychologists call 'inaction regrets'. At the end of our lives according to psychologist Tom Gilovich, 84% of our regrets will not be the mistakes we made but the opportunities we missed. It's the things that we would have could have and should have done but did not do. Yes, you will experience a few fails, a few falls but cutting the rope is the way that we cut the ribbon on our dreams.

We continue our series, Win the Day we've talked about flip the script, kiss the wave, eat the frog, two messages, two habits this weekend. If you have a Bible, you can meet me in Mark's gospel Mark chapter four verse 35, we'll get there in a minute. In his book, Deep Work, Georgetown Professor Cal Newport talks about a concept that he calls the grand gesture and it takes a few different forms. It can be a romantic gesture like getting down on a knee and proposing marriage. It can be a physical gesture like taking one of those before pictures when you start a diet or a new exercise routine. It can be a creative gesture, like the one way missionaries who a century ago would pack their belongings in a coffin instead of a suitcase because they knew they would never return. Simply put a grand gesture is a defining decision, a calculated risk, a selfless sacrifice that doubles as a defining moment in your life.

I'll make it personal in October of 1989. I walked into the admissions office at the University of Chicago and I told a very surprised admissions officer that they could have their full ride scholarship

back because I was transferring to a school called Central Bible College not even regionally accredited. In May of 1994, Lora and I packed all of our earthly belongings into a 15 foot U-Haul, and made the move from Chicago to DC, no place to live, no guaranteed salary. Now, I don't know that I would have used this language back then but those were grand gestures. Those were small steps of faith that turned into giant leaps. They were tipping points and turning points in our journey.

Now this is so important when it comes to winning the day. Let me double down. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther posted 95 theses on the doors of the Castle Church. On December 1, 1955 Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus in Montgomery, Alabama. On May 25, 1961, John F. Kennedy said we would land a man on the moon return him safely to the earth by the end of the decade. Any way you slice it or dice it, the genesis of the Protestant Reformation, the civil rights movement and the space race were these grand gestures. When it comes to goal setting, problem solving, habit forming grand gestures are one small step, one giant leap. They are the point of no return. Now I know that I'm citing moments of tremendous historical significance but even if they aren't newsworthy, grand gestures are no less noteworthy when it comes to our own personal lives.

I want to talk a little bit about the art and science of grand gestures but I want you to hear me this idea is as old as Old Testament altars. From Genesis to Revelation the Bible is full of grand gestures, Noah builds a really big boat, go big, or go home. Abraham puts Isaac on the altar. The Israelites circle Jericho for seven days. Benaiah chases a lion into a pit on a snowy day and kills it. Esther does a three day fast. Elisha burns his plowing equipment. Ezekiel lays on his left side for 390 days. James and John drop their nets. Peter gets out of the boat. Zacchaeus climbed a Sycamore tree and the Ephesians - Oh, they build a bonfire and burn their scrolls. That's the tip of the iceberg but these are the tipping points. These are the days when decades happen. These are the inciting incidents that turn into defining moments. And each one of them in their own unique way cut the rope. For some of them it was a Field of Dreams moment. If you build it, they will come. For others it was an enough is enough moment, the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of change. One way or the other there comes a moment in your life where you have to cut the rope.

Mark chapter four, verse 35, here we go, "When evening came, Jesus said to His disciples, let's cross to the other side of the lake." Let me set the scene. I've sailed the Sea of Galilee a few times and I'll tell you this, it's going to take more than a minute to get to the other side. It's 13 miles long, it's about eight miles wide and it says that they set out as the sun set. I don't think that's insignificant. Now, I'm just speaking personal opinion, personal experience but when you're out on the open sea, it's a little bit scarier at night than in broad daylight.

Hold that thought, verse 36, "*Leaving the crowd behind.*" Well sermon within a sermon, sometimes you need to leave the crowd behind. Well how do you do that? Glad you asked. Almost all of us are suffering from information overload. We are bombarded with news and fake news every minute of every hour of every day. We've got online advertising vying for our attention with click bait. We've got social

media algorithms targeting us based on likes and follows and search history. And I've said this before, but let me say it again for good measure. In my opinion, consuming social media, which is different than creating social media it's like eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. I'm just not convinced that we were designed with the capacity to know everything about everything all the time. I'm certainly not suggesting that we bury our head in the sand. We need to be praying the news, which is very different than watching the news. Karl Barth said, "Take your Bible, take your newspaper and read both, but interpret newspapers from your Bible." If we get this backwards, we're in trouble. When we filter the Bible through the news, our theology conforms to our reality and it actually becomes a form of idolatry.

So how do you leave the crowd behind? For starters, average person spends 142 minutes on social media and some of you are above average. That represents 15% of our waking hours. Is this how you want to spend 15% of your life? Lora and I have been so overwhelmed by the news of recent days and weeks that you know what we did this week, day off, phone off? Like, it's crazy how hard it is to do that? Well, there might be an emergency. Sure, now that I turned my phone back on a lot of text messages. You know what the first one said, "Hey, sorry to bother you on your day off, but. Yeah, like that's gonna happen every single time. Here's what I've learned, if you want to turn down, if you want to turn up the still small voice of the Holy Spirit, you have to turn down the white noise. Who is the loudest voice in your life? I mean, let's just keep it real it's whoever you listen to the most.

It says, ³⁶ *Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.* ³⁷ *But soon a furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped."*

NIV says furious squall, NLT, furious storm, ESV, great wind storm. It's hard to know for sure but let me add a little typography to the chronology to see if we can kind of identify what kind of storm this was. The Sea of Galilee is 700 feet below sea level, but it's surrounded by hills and mountains, the Golan Heights, which were called the Decapolis, back in Jesus day, about 2,500 feet above sea level. And so that geography makes the Sea of Galilee susceptible to very sudden, very violent storms. Best guess, I don't know, category three, category four. And it says Jesus was in the stern, and I like this, sleeping on a cushion.

Now, if I ran for political office, I am not announcing my candidacy for anything but if I did, one of my planks would be a nationally mandated naptime. You don't have to nap you just need to observe it. I think we would be a kinder, gentler nation, I think we would be a happier and healthier people. In all seriousness, sleep is a stewardship issue. Now I know a lot of sermons within a sermon this week, so be it. A NASA study found that a 26 minute nap increases productivity 34%. Now I know a lot of this depends on chronotype and circadian rhythm but most of my creativity happens before noon but if I get a little nap right there in the middle of the day, guess what? I get two windows of creativity. I get two

windows of productivity. Long story short Jesus napped, that's all I need to know. I want to be just like Jesus.

"The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" I think this is a part of the story that gets overlooked but I find it fascinating Jesus is sleeping. And evidently, that means he doesn't care? That's what the disciples are inferring. We are so quick, especially in crisis situations to assign blame. We are so quick to attribute wrong motives in stressful situations. Our natural tendency is to play the blame game and that's what the disciples do. They don't just react, they overreact, the disciples, panic. There are a lot of people panicking right now. I will say this, it's much easier to act like a Christian than it is to react like one but it's our reactions that reveal what's really in our hearts. Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.

Last weekend, I said, words matter. Listen, words are like an x-ray of the soul. Now, in case you haven't noticed, if you changed news channels, everybody is blaming everybody else for everything. We've got to stay humble and stay hungry, we've got to stay calm and carry on. We've got to stay in our lane and stay the course. I'm going to ask a very important question or two. How much of what you're saying is a regurgitation of the news channels you're watching and the social media that you're consuming? And how much of what you're saying is a recitation of the revelation that you are getting from God's word? We cannot just regurgitate what we are consuming from culture. We've got to make sure - we need a word from God.

Verse 39, Then Jesus got up and grabbed an oar. Then Jesus got up and started bailing the boat. No! *"Then Jesus got up and rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Peace be still!" The wind died down and it was completely calm."* We suffer from something called hindsight bias. We know how every story in the Bible ends and so we assume the beginning and we lose the element of surprise, we lose the shock and awe. But Jesus he stands up in the boat like Karate Kid and does the crane. I mean, this is an epic, epic moment. I mean, who does this? Who rebukes the wind? Who talks to waves and says *"Peace be still"*? The one who made the wind and the waves?

Now I sense in my spirit, in light of everything that is happening in culture that this is a moment for the people of God to exercise their spiritual authority, listen to me, with humility with humility, and rebuke some wind and waves. This is a moment for us to stand in the gap as peacemakers, grace givers and tone setters. How? Well you better put on the full armor of God. Let's start right there. But listen, our weapons are not carnal. Our weapons have the divine power to demolish strongholds. We don't just fight fire with fire. We shift the atmosphere by operating in the opposite spirit. We rebuke hate with love. We rebuke pride with humility. We rebuke cursing with blessing. We rebuke lies with truth. We rebuke injustice with righteousness. We rebuke racism with repentance. We rebuke cancel culture with grace. We exercise our authority with humility. Come on, we have the authority to move mountains. We have the authority over evil spirits. I know that sounds a little spooky but we are not wrestling against flesh and blood but against powers and principalities. We have authority over death and disease. We

underestimate our authority in Christ because we fail to understand our identity in Christ. *"Whatever you bind on earth,"* Jesus said in Matthew 18:18 *"will be bound in heaven."* Now, it has to be in the will of God and for the glory of God but if it is, look out.

Let me talk about two kinds of grand gestures and then I'll talk about two ways to cut the rope. The first kind of grand gesture is this field of dreams gesture, if you build it, they will come. It's Noah, building the ark by faith. It's Abraham making the move from Huron to Shechem without really knowing where he was going. It's the little boy who gives Jesus his brown bag lunch, right five loaves to fish. The other kind of grand gesture and I wonder if some of you are at this point right now enough, is enough. You hit this point of no return where it's just like now or never. It's David's decision, you can taunt us for 40 days, but enough is enough. It's Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refusing to bow to a 90 foot statue of Nebuchadnezzar. It's Jesus cursing a barren fig tree not producing any fruit.

Either way, two keys to cutting the rope. One, you got to kneel down and two, you got to stand up. I'm not sure how else to say this. We need revival. What does that mean? It's 2 Chronicles 7:14, *"If my people who are called by my name, will one humbled themselves two pray, three seek my face, four turn from their wicked ways then I will one here from heaven, two forgive their sin and three, heal their land."* Revival always begins with repentance, repentance for personal sin, lamenting for corporate sin, and it starts with the people of God.

Rodney Gypsy Smith, was born on the outskirts of London 1860, no formal education. Yet he lectured at Harvard, grew up in a gypsy tent, but invited to the White House by two different presidents, criss-crossed the Atlantic Ocean 45 times, preached the gospel to millions of people, powerfully moved by God. One day, a group came and asked him, "How can God use us the way that he is used you?" And I love the answer that Gypsy Smith gave. "Go home. Go home, and lock yourself in your bedroom. Then take a piece of chalk and draw a circle on the floor. Then kneel in that circle and pray brokenly and fervently that God would send revival in that circle." That's where revival starts when the people of God get in their prayer circle and pray that way.

One you have to kneel down but then two you have to stand up. On January 30, 1956, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was speaking at First Baptist Church when he was interrupted and told that his home had been bombed that night. He was sitting at his kitchen table when he heard a voice. "Martin, do not be afraid." It was the defining moment for Dr. King. I think a lot of people would have retreated to safety. Dr. King rebuked the wind and the waves. He said this, "You may be 38 years old as I happen to be and one day, some great opportunity stands before you and calls you to stand up for some great principles, some great issues, some great cause and you refuse to do it because you're afraid." You refuse to do it because you want to live longer, you're afraid that you will lose your job or you are afraid that you will be criticized, that you will lose your popularity, or you're afraid that somebody will stab you or shoot at you or bomb your house so you refuse to take the stand. Well, you may go on and live until you are 90 but you're just as dead as at 38 as you would be at 90. The cessation of breathing in your life is but the belated

announcement of an earlier death of spirit. That is how you exercise spiritual authority, you kneel down, and you stand up, and you do it all over again. You kneel down, you stand up and you do it all over. You kneel down and stand up and kneel down and stand up and kneel down and stand up.

Let me close with this, the strangest thing happened this week. I was watching a Facebook post from my friend, Dr. David Anderson a few days ago. And he's working with our multicultural team, as we strive to become this beloved community that embodies racial unity. And I'm watching his response to the insurrection that happened on January 6, at the Capitol and I thought I'd closed the window. Now evidently, I did not and I have no idea how this happened. I know technology is quirky but it felt a little bit like a burning bush. I kid you not. I am working on this message and all of a sudden I hear this voice out of nowhere, "He's still large and in charge." Lord? What? What? And that was it. And then I did not I didn't even touch my computer, I swear, scouts... I did not touch my computer. Like what just happened? And it was one of those moments where I needed to hear that, "He's still large and in charge." I want you to know today that God is still on the throne. God's got this. God's got you. His kingdom is going to come. His will is going to be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name. Amen.