Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, June 14, 2026
"Warning About Trouble"

Young at Heart Message

Who here is familiar with the game *Trouble*?

For those of you who are not familiar (or for those of you who haven't played it in a long time), here is an image of the game:

As you can see, there are four colours to choose from. Each player chooses a colour.

All of the pieces need to start in their home base. The goal of the game is to get all four of your pieces into the area I'll call the "safe row."

Each player takes a turn popping the "pop-o-matic" die in the middle of the board. The only way to get a piece out of the home base and start moving around the board is to pop a 6.

Once your players are on the board, you take turns moving your pieces around the board.

However, you have to be careful because if another player pops a number that allows them to "land" on the same space one of your players is on, you get bumped off the board and back to your home base.

If a piece happens to make it into the "safe row," other players can no longer bump you off the board.

However, you have to pop the exact number required to get you into the “safe row.” So, if it will only take you 3 moves to get into the “safe row” but you pop a 4, you cannot move your piece.

The first player to get all of their pieces into their own “safe row” wins the game.

The fun of this game, of course, comes when players start knocking other players off the board and sending them back to start over again at their home base.

It is very often the case that a player could be moving around the board quite quickly, minding their own business and thinking they are absolutely going to win, when out of nowhere another player swoops in, lands on their space, and knocks them back to home base.

In fact, I have played this game and have had all four of my pieces moving around the board while another player has none of their pieces out.

I find myself thinking “wow, I’m for sure going to win this game.” Then suddenly, they pop a 6, start moving around the board, knock some of my pieces off, and win the game!

It’s fun and unpredictable (and a little silly, to be sure).

The fun of this game is the unpredictability. It wouldn’t be nearly as much fun if there wasn’t a risk of getting kicked back to home base.

We enjoy unpredictability when it’s safe, like when we are playing a game like *Trouble*.

But unpredictability can also feel really scary in other contexts.

Last week, we talked about how creating routines reduces unpredictability in our own lives.

For example, if I keep a weekly routine of doing laundry on Wednesday and Saturday, I know exactly when I will have clean clothes.

Or, if I routinely fill my gas tank when it has a quarter of a tank left, I don’t need to worry about running out of gas.

Unpredictability in this case would be really scary, and perhaps even dangerous.

I remember once when I was driving from Colorado back home to Wisconsin, I made the decision to wait for one more gas station before I filled up.

What I didn't know was that there would not be another gas station for a *very* long time.

I started to get quite worried that I was going to run out of gas in the middle of nowhere.

I ended up finding a station with about 2 miles to empty on my tank.

I was basically rolling in on fumes to that gas station.

In these scenarios, unpredictability is definitely not what we want.

On the other hand, all of life is fairly unpredictable.

We can never be certain what the future may hold for us. We can set ourselves up as best we can for success, but life can throw us curveballs.

And the question then becomes: would it be better or worse to know what is coming in the future?

The Message

Today's Gospel passage plays with this question.

Jesus tells his newly appointed Apostles that he's sending them like lambs into a pack of wolves.

Think about that. You're one of the disciples who has just been chosen to be an *Apostle* - given the power to "force out evil spirits and to heal every kind of disease and sickness." What an honour!

Oh but yeah, I forgot to mention, I'm throwing you to the wolves. Good luck!

It's not exactly the vote of confidence and certainty that the Apostles were likely hoping for.

Jesus goes on to tell them that they will be "dragged before rulers and kings… but when someone arrests you, don't worry."

I have to imagine the Apostles were all looking at each other like… what did he just say? Did we actually want to sign up for this?

Jesus then talks about what they will witness:

- Siblings betraying one another and having each other put to death

- Parents betraying their own children

- Children turning against their parents and having them killed

- Being hated by *everyone* because of Jesus

Then Jesus tells them to simply remain faithful, and they will be saved.

Jesus doesn't promise them that this road will be easy.

And actually, I'm not sure if it would be better to know all of this in advance or not.

Maybe in this case, unpredictability would have been better.

Because now, do you think they're thinking "no big deal, what comes will come" or do you think they're all wondering exactly when they will encounter these things?

I think knowing the future in advance could, at least for some of us, cause us to become paralyzed by fear.

How many of us would be thrilled to do what Jesus is asking considering the consequences that are to be expected?

It's certainly not an easy ask.

Knowing what is going to happen in advance can sometimes be a good thing, but other times it could create major problems for us.

Knowing in advance about a major life event might allow us to prepare for it, certainly. But, it also might paralyze us wondering when it will happen.

I'll share a parallel example from my own life.

My first Bernese Mountain Dog, Kodiak, was about 6.5 years old when I started noticing some weird things happening to him.

He had some random yelps of pain that I couldn't duplicate, so when I took him to the vet, everything seemed fine.

Then he appeared to be seeing things for a while, but his eyes were fine.

Then he had a strange cough that wouldn't go away, but eventually subsided.

And finally, he stopped being able to wag his tail.

Each time I took him to the vet, I knew there was something wrong, but I couldn't tell them where to look.

In desperation I asked one vet if they could just do a full body x-ray. They declined, saying that without knowing what they're looking for, it would be too much radiation to expose him to unnecessarily.

Over the 6 months between when I started noticing symptoms and when he was diagnosed with cancer and ultimately ushered over the rainbow bridge, I began to seriously dwell on losing him.

I would worry so much about what I would do if I lost him, and then I would find myself sad and depressed, even though he was still right in front of me.

It was as though I knew he was going to die (because I did, if I was being honest with myself), but I didn't know when.

So instead of enjoying every minute I did have left with him, I spent a lot of time worrying about what would happen when he was gone.

I was so worried about it that I genuinely believed I might not be able to function if I lost him.

When I finally did lose him, I was obviously upset and filled with grief. But guess what?

I was able to keep going. I had to.

There was no other choice.

I learned from that experience that as hard as it is, it is not worth dwelling on things that we can't control and can't predict.

If we dwell on a future that we know is coming, but aren't sure when, we forget to live in the moment.

And, we may even become paralyzed from fear or uncertainty.

If the Apostles allowed themselves to be paralyzed by their fear of what Jesus told them would happen, they would not have moved forward at all.

Instead, they stepped boldly forward and did the work they were called to do, aware of the possible consequences and as prepared as they could be for the inevitability of them.

It is a testament to their ability to live in the moment and not allow fear to paralyze them.

I am sure it was not easy to hear what Jesus foreshadowed and continue to do what they were called to do anyway. But they did.

They did it scared.

And in doing so, they reminded us that Jesus never promised us that life would be easy. Jesus never promised that life wouldn't be scary.

Jesus simply promised that if you remain faithful, you will be saved.

So, may you work to live in the moment – enjoying the life that is in front of you in all of its awe and beauty and wonder.

May you find the courage to do things even though you might be scared.

And, may you draw on the courage and strength of Jesus and his Apostles who demonstrated their ability to boldly move forward into a world that was uncertain.

With courage, strength, and joy, may you continue the journey and experience all of the wonder and beauty of this imperfect, lovely life you have been given.

Amen.

Let us pray:

Loving God, our deep distrust separates us from you, but you reach out to us in our fear with love and grace. You forgive us; you heal us; you bless us. We open our hearts to your Spirit, that the good news of your love might sink in and change us. Creator God, make us new. Loving Christ, come and speak to us. Holy Spirit, give us new life. Amen.