

**2006 SUMMER SERMON SERIES II**  
***A NEW WAY TO PLAY***  
**Matthew 16:13-16, 20-26**  
**June 25, 2006**

In the movie "Hoosiers", Gene Hackman plays the part of Norman Dale – a basketball coach who comes to rural Indiana in the 1950s. He's been hired to coach the boys' high school team in the TINY town of Hickory – and in the beginning, the community is PLEASED with their new coach. But when basketball season begins – the new coach announces he is introducing a new way to play – a philosophy/style that focuses on passing the ball and playing good defense – a decision that is met with RESISTANCE by the community.

Some of the good folks in the community SUGGEST to Norman Dale that he re-think his strategy – but the coach refuses to back down. And at the first practice, some of the players quit in protest, leaving the team "short-handed". When the team goes on to lose its first two games, the townspeople are CONVINCED Norman Dale's hiring is a "mistake" and call for him to be FIRED.

I wonder this morning – has anyone HERE ever tried to change minds and attitudes that were already "programmed" to think and act in certain ways? ***Have you ever tried to get someone to be "open" to new ways of doing things?*** Now – preachers NEVER have to deal with this sort of thing – but I'M TOLD that ***getting people to "change" – to see things from a different perspective – is ALWAYS a CHALLENGE.***

- when Henry Ford proposed to the engineers at the Ford Motor Company that automobiles should be built on an assembly line, his idea was scoffed at by those who believed the ONLY way to build cars was one at a time
- the U.S. Congress is currently engaged in a bitter debate over the war in Iraq – do we "stay the course" or turn it over to the Iraqis and begin to pull our forces out [BOTH sides have their "heels dug in" and NEITHER side is having much luck trying to convince the other]
- and with the World Cup going on – which is BEST: FUTBOL [soccer] or FOOTBALL?

***Getting people to consider a different perspective/to change is NEVER EASY.*** THAT becomes obvious in the Scripture reading for this morning.

After a time of hectic ministry around the Sea of Galilee – Jesus takes his followers north – away from the crowds – to a place called Caesarea Philippi. Caesarea Philippi is a Roman-style city in northern Israel named

after Emperor Caesar and King Philip, the son of Herod the Great and the ruler of this region ["Caesar" + "Philip" = "Caesarea Philippi"].

Being a "Roman-style city" means that ***Caesarea Philippi is more ROMAN than Jewish – public baths; streets laid out in Roman style – and there are MANY pagan temples*** dedicated to the various gods and goddesses of Rome. It is a strange, mystical place – ***not at all the kind of place you'd expect to find Jesus***. Imagine Jesus suddenly appearing today – but instead of going to "church" somewhere [as we might expect] – he goes instead to Starbucks or the Mall! That's in essence what Jesus does – he takes his followers to this very cosmopolitan, very WORLDLY place.

Jesus takes his followers to Caesarea Philippi – this mystical place filled with multiple "gods" – to ask them a very important question: *Who do PEOPLE say I am?*

The disciples answer that the "polls" are pretty CONSISTENT: ***people view Jesus as a prophet-reformer in the tradition of Elijah, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist***. But Jesus presses them FURTHER: *Who do YOU say I am?* And Peter [who speaks for them all] declares: *You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!*

We would think Jesus would be GLAD to hear this, right? But Jesus' response is, to say the least, ODD. ***Instead of WELCOMING this news, Jesus sternly WARNS his followers: Do NOT tell anyone I am "MESSIAH"!***

Now – ***WHY would Jesus DO something like that?*** He IS the "messiah" – isn't he? Don't you think Jesus would WANT people to know "*I am the MESSIAH!*"? So – ***WHY does he warn his "people" NOT to tell anyone?***

I want to suggest to you that it has something to do with what biblical scholars refer to as "messianic expectations". Jewish people in the 1<sup>st</sup> century FIRMLY believed that God was going to send a "messiah" [***someone who was not necessarily "divine" but who was clearly sent by God***] to end Israel's oppression by foreign powers like Rome and who would help Israel become a strong, independent nation again.

This "messiah" would be a strong, savvy leader who embodies the best attributes of Israel's greatest leaders – Moses, David, Solomon – so ***the messiah would be part prophet, part warrior, part political genius [all rolled into one!]***. In EVERYONE'S minds – the Messiah would be someone with CHARISMA – POWER – and to some extent WEALTH – so when Peter declares: *You are the Christ, the Son of God!* – he's simply reaffirming

what EVERY Jew believed about the messiah – AND the disciples HOPE that Jesus IS that person – not only for ISRAEL'S SAKE – but for THEIRS, too!

But *Jesus REJECTS their expectations*; he throws “cold water” on their high hopes – and he does by:

- saying: *Don't tell anyone I'm THAT kind of Messiah!*
- by introducing a new “philosophy” – a NEW WAY of understanding what “messiah” means [a way that involves rejection, suffering, death, resurrection]

Now – let's be CLEAR about something: *the concept of a messiah who suffers is something TOTALLY NEW for Jesus' followers: NO Jew in the time of Jesus expected the Messiah to “suffer”*. Remember – CHARISMA, POWER, and WEALTH would characterize the Messiah! In fact, the notion that the Messiah might SUFFER is such an OFFENSIVE one that Peter takes Jesus aside and chastises him: *This can NEVER be! Don't EVER talk like this AGAIN!*

But Jesus chastises Peter: *You're acting like SATAN, God's enemy – because you're thinking from a HUMAN point of view and not GOD'S*. Instead of being a Messiah of charisma, power, and wealth – *Jesus has come to seek out the lost and to give his life for many*. And he tells his followers: *Being my disciple is NOT about having things YOUR way – getting what YOU want. If you want to be my disciple, you must DENY yourselves, TAKE UP your cross, and FOLLOW [imitate] me*.

These words TROUBLED Jesus' followers. They trouble US, too – don't they? I say that because we live in a culture that equates LIFE and SUCCESS with FAME and FORTUNE. Why do you think “American Idol” is SO popular? Because *every one of us at one time or another fantasizes about being RICH or FAMOUS – or BOTH*. There's a part of human nature that believes the way to LIFE – the measure of TRUE WORTH – is being ADORED and HAVING EVERYTHING.

But Jesus' question raises the question of the day: What profit is there in having everything if you lose your soul in the process? *What if “having it all” DOESN'T lead to happiness? What if being the “center of the universe” DOESN'T fill the emptiness inside? What if you GET IT ALL – only to discover in the end that you've MISSED OUT on what's REALLY important?*

There's a new commercial on TV - maybe you've seen it. It raises the UNSPOKEN QUESTION: *Why do you drive the CAR you drive?* Different people respond in different ways:

- *"Because Daddy never hugged me"*
- *"Because the more guys notice me, the more I love myself"*
- *"Because I make more money than you"*
- *"Because I'm compensating for my shortcomings"*

The commercial is really a MIRROR for the way we live.

We build our lives [our sense of WORTH and IMPORTANCE] around the cars we drive, the clothes we wear, the houses we live in, the places we visit – because ***deep down inside we truly BELIEVE "having it all" or "having it MY WAY" will bring us satisfaction and meaning.*** But Jesus says we CAN "have it all" and still NEVER be truly "alive" – NEVER be truly "happy".

But there IS a way to be truly ALIVE – and Jesus shows us the way. REAL LIVING means:

- accepting God's love that helps us accept ourselves
- finding grace to grow and change to become MORE than we are
- loving God and caring for others MORE than love/care for ourselves

In "Hoosiers" – Norman Dale REFUSES to back off from what he knows is the BEST way to coach the Hickory Huskers. And things get WORSE before they get better. But finally, the team wins one game – then another – and then another. The players begin to believe in the coach's philosophy – and in themselves. The star player who quit decides it's better to be on a team than on the sidelines. They make it into the state tournament and go all the way to the Finals. But ***it ONLY happens when they learn a new way to play the game.***

Brothers and Sisters – Jesus tells us this morning: *HAVING IT ALL doesn't make you happy. Life isn't about THINGS. The way to life comes from walking with me – loving God and others. It's NOT easy. But if you LET me – I can show you a "new way to play" – and you'll discover what LIFE is all about.*

Will Jesus' way be OUR way?

THAT is really the QUESTION of the day – isn't it?

Let us pray....