

Sermon: Uncomfortable**Text: Mark 8:31-38****Discussion Questions:**

Let's talk today about "comfort zones."

It seems as though I often hear this phrase when a person is giving their testimony—or describing a way that God has been at work in their life. They'll say something like: "Looking back, I know that I went through that really difficult time in my life for a reason. I now realize that God was pushing me out of my comfort zone, causing me to put my trust in Him."

- What do you think it means when someone talks about getting "out of their comfort zone"?
- Is this something you've ever heard someone say before?
- Is this something that YOU have ever said before?
- Elaborate on this—talk about some times in your life when God was taking you out of your comfort zone.
- Looking back on these experiences—do you believe God had a purpose in creating circumstances that made you feel uncomfortable? What do you think that purpose was?
- What did you learn that you probably wouldn't have learned any other way?

When we're operating within our comfort zone, this basically means that we're doing things or facing situations that we've experienced before. We have a lot of confidence in our own ability to handle the situation (or the ability of those we're with). We're being called upon to do something that doesn't overwhelm us in any way. It doesn't cause alarm, or get our blood pumping and our heart racing.

However—when we are pushed outside of our comfort zone, everything changes. Anxiety sets in. Fear threatens to take over. We start to doubt ourselves or the people we're with. It's in times like these that faith becomes a major factor. Do I trust myself? Do I trust those around me? Most importantly—do I trust God?

My mind immediately flashes to one of my favorite stories that illustrates the kind of faith that is required when we're out of our comfort zone. Back in 1859, a man named "Blondin the Great" went to Niagara Falls to perform. He was a tightrope walker, and he correctly thought that by crossing the river gorge on a wire, he would draw great crowds (and make a lot of money!). His first crossing was in June of that summer—and by August he had made the trip about ten times (each time doing something a bit more daring). But it was his last crossing on August 14th that would be his greatest test. He announced that he would carry his manager, Harry Colcord, on his back! I won't tell you what happened (Google it...it's quite a story)—but I do want to ask a few questions:

- Before Blondin approached Harry Colcord with the idea of having him get on his back, how much faith do you think Colcord had in Blondin's abilities?
- How did everything change for Colcord when Blondin asked him to get on his back?
- This story is a clear example of being pushed out of one's comfort zone. What are some things that Colcord had to remind himself while on Blondin's back?
- Have you ever felt like Colcord on that wire? What did you do? What did God do?

Examination:

- Read **Matthew 14:13-21**:
 - We know the crowd size was 5,000 men give or take. When you add women and children, there could easily have been around 20,000 people. It was late afternoon, a remote location, and it's fair to assume that people were getting hungry and perhaps a bit restless. Given these things, what do we see the disciples suggesting to Jesus in verse 15?
 - Everything changes in verse 16. How does Jesus' instruction to the disciples relate to our conversation regarding "comfort zones"? Compare what Jesus says to the disciples to what Blondin says to Colcord.
 - What do you make of the response of the disciples in verse 17?
 - We don't really know the exact dynamics of HOW the bread and fish were multiplied, but we see in verse 19 that the disciples were a part of distribution. It's very possible that the bread and fish literally multiplied in the hands of the disciples as they were in the act of pulling off pieces. What do you think was going through their minds? What was Jesus teaching these men by pushing them out of their comfort zone?

- Read **Mark 4:35-41**:
 - This isn't the first or only time the disciples find themselves in a boat in a severe storm out in the Sea of Galilee. Nor is the fact that they're in a storm what I would view as a coincidence. Every time these men find themselves in a storm—Jesus has something that He wants to teach them. What do you make of what is Jesus doing? (v. 38)
 - Talk about ways in which the storms of life put us out of our comfort zone.
 - According to verse 40, what was Jesus upset about? How did the disciples respond to being out of their comfort zone? How did Jesus WANT them to respond?

- Read **Mark 8:31-38**:
 - Why was Peter so upset when Jesus began talking about going to the cross?
 - What were the "human concerns" that Peter and the other disciples had in mind?
 - These words are the ultimate call to get out of our comfort zone. Jesus isn't just calling us (notice He was speaking to both the disciples AND the crowd) to have faith in Him—He's calling us to die to ourselves. What does Jesus say will be the ultimate result of our willingness to take up our cross and follow Him?
 - Discuss what you think it means when we say "The cost of discipleship."
 - How does "counting the cost" relate to our faith in Christ?
 - How does "counting the cost" relate to our LOVE FOR Christ?
 - Why does Jesus want us to count the cost—and take up our cross?

Application:

Often times, we go through seasons (months and sometimes years) when we live out of our comfort zones—perhaps a journey through cancer, or a job that we struggle with. Most of the time, though, we face situations on a daily basis when God puts us out of our comfort zone. It can be a storm that whips up around us—or a situation when we sense Jesus saying to us: "YOU feed them!" Either way, embrace these trials as opportunities. Acknowledge that God has, indeed, taken you out of your comfort zone—and He has something (or many things!) that he wants you to learn. Get on His back, and trust Him!