

- I. Good morning, as Jeannie said, my name is A.J. Meador. My family and I are excited to be here, and to move to Tallahassee over the next month. I look forward to meeting all of you beginning with the reception in the fellowship hall following the service. One of my early goals is to visit with each of you before the end of the year, and in order to hit the ground running there are sign-up sheets for one-on-one or family meetings with me through the middle of August. You can find the sheets in the office and there are slots open beginning tomorrow morning at 10, so I hope you will check that out and you can possibly carve out some time in your schedules in the coming weeks! Again, I look forward to getting to know each of you, listening to how this church has had an impact on your life, and your hopes and dreams for the future as we seek to share the love of Christ in this city.
- II. I also want to take a moment to thank the Pastor Nominating Committee. Mary, Nolan, Doc, Sally, and Cliff have spent many long hours whittling the candidates down, and then working with me and my family to bring us and this congregation to this day. They have been wonderful ambassadors for the church. Thank you for your hard and faithful work on behalf of this congregation.

- III. Our second Scripture reading this morning comes from the Gospel of Mark 5:21-43, let us listen for the word of the Lord.
- IV. I'm going to lift the veil back ever so slightly on the process of receiving and accepting a new call in the Presbyterian Church. This is the third call process I've gone through in ministry. The process is not unlike online dating, or an elaborate matchmaking game. Pastors complete an information form about themselves, full of essay questions to explain what they are looking for in a church, and identify their various gifts and passions. Churches essentially do the same thing, sharing their history and purpose, and describing their interests and passions. And then the online matchmaking begins.
- V. Using a highly sophisticated algorithm, mixed in with a certain percent of God's providence known only to John Calvin himself, the computer sends prospective matches to congregations. On the other end, pastors have the opportunity to compare their interests with the information form submitted by the church to see if that congregation will be a good fit. The nominating committee sifts through the applications to find the right pastor for their congregation. I believe the newsletter the other week mentioned there were over thirty pastor information forms that your nominating

committee worked through to get us to this Sunday. Hopefully I don't disappoint, if so you can speak with Cliff during the reception.

- VI. In the process here, there was a skype interview, an in-person interview, and finally a church visit. That of course doesn't include the behind the scenes work the committee did: watching countless sermons and checking references. And that was just with me, so again be sure to thank your committee for the time, energy, and dedication during this process. So after what amounts to several hours of interaction over the course of a few months the pastor and nominating committee are tasked with making a decision. The committee has to ask themselves: "Is this person the right pastor for our congregation?" And the pastor asks: "Is this church a place that fits the pastor's talents and passions?" Both the pastor and committee either take a step out in faith, or move on to the next candidate. Regardless of how much each believe they might be a good fit for one another, only time will truly tell if that's the case or not.
- VII. New jobs, new relationships, doing a new thing at church requires taking a risk, a stepping out in faith to see where God's providence will lead. There have been times in my life where the risk has not been met with reward, and there are others that have exceeded my wildest expectations. My wife,

Katherine, and I met in seminary at Columbia in Decatur, GA. We were pretty good friends throughout our first semester, about halfway through our second semester I summoned up enough courage to ask her out.

VIII. We were out this little dive called "Trackside" on a Thursday night. I went up to her and said, "Hey." And she said, "Hey" back. I thought to myself, okay I've got that out of the way, next step...and then some how I stammered out the words, "So.....you want to go out next week?" And she had a big smile on her face and said, "Yes." Trying to stay calm, cool, and collected I said, "That's great, looking forward to it." I managed to stand there and make conversation for a little bit longer before going to talk to some other friends, but what I really wanted to do after she accepted my invitation was give a fist pump and run outside and scream, "YES!" as loud as I could in the parking lot. But neither of these options would have been considered playing it cool. And as they say, the rest is history...

IX. I was so scared Katherine would say no. Even though we were hanging out a lot, spending pretty much every Monday night together watching Jack Bauer in 24. And while I was about 80% sure the feelings were mutual, I was still terrified she might say no, because you never truly know how

someone feels about you, if they're even slightly interested, until you step out in faith. Again, I wasn't asking her to marry me, yet, just a first date.

- X. Time and time again when posed with difficult or tough decisions, we are tasked with burying these negative thoughts, the fears we have that could prevent us from moving forward, from stepping out in faith to do something that might change our lives forever, and bring untold joy into our lives. Whether that's moving to a new city for a new job, beginning a new relationship, or stepping out in faith to receive healing from an unknown healer. In the passage we have two examples of very different people who cast aside their fear to meet Jesus and receive healing.
- XI. The woman who was bleeding should not have been out in the crowd in the first place. It was common in that context for women to be quarantined until they stopped hemorrhaging because according to Levitical law they were considered unclean. But there she was in the middle of a large crowd, trying as hard as she could to get to Jesus. This healer she had heard about was making the rounds nearby and she probably thought to herself, maybe just maybe, he could heal me. She was at the end of her rope by this point in her life, and no law from Leviticus was going to stop her after twelve years of hemorrhages. Twelve years of being poked and prodded by

physicians whom she thought would be able to stop the bleeding, but only made matters worse. Twelve years of blowing through what income she had to seek a solution for this unseemly problem she couldn't shake. She stepped out in faith, reached out to Jesus among the throng of people, that was unwittingly fighting her off until finally she touched his cloak, and was healed immediately.

XII. But that's not the end! When confronted by Jesus she stepped out in faith again. In her fear and trembling of being exposed to the crowd as unclean, she tells him the truth, "It was I Jesus!" In stepping out in faith the woman is not only physically healed, but is restored to life in a community. Jesus does not leave her unchanged, he heals her yes, but also calls her daughter, a claim that we can hear as breathing new life into her emotionally and spiritually.

XIII. In the case of Jairus we have a man confronted with the fear that no parent wishes to even entertain in their mind. His child is on death's doorstep. This leader of the synagogue responded to his fear by stepping out and seeking not priests from his temple but the healer making the rounds in surrounding lake side communities. He takes a step out in faith and his daughter's life is restored. The life-giving power of God has broken into the

world and is restoring lives, relationships, bringing healing and hope to places that were thought to be unclean or dead.

- XIV. This Wednesday we celebrate Independence Day, a day when 56 individuals stepped out in faith, confronted fear, and stated what they believed and why the colonies required new governance by signing the Declaration of Independence. We look back on this act and think nothing of the consequences of their actions, but had we lost the war they would have been some of the first to be hanged for treason. The document, which has become a sort of confessional document for all United States citizens, states: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”
- XV. In his book *The Soul of America*, Jon Meacham sees the Declaration, especially this section of the preamble as the cornerstone of the “soul” of our country. Throughout the book he points out times when fear gripped the country, and devastation seemed inevitable, yet each and every time good men and women rose to the occasion and abided their better angels. Our forefathers and mothers were imperfect people but they sought to attain a better future for themselves and their fellow colonists. As we know

all too well the country and its people will falter, we are imperfect people striving to rise to live out our greatest virtues, to respond to fear with hope, and for us Christians to share the grace and love of the one who brings everlasting healing. As one President said it well, “Grace is not earned. Grace is not merited. It’s not something we deserve. Rather, grace is the free and benevolent favor of God as manifested in the salvation of sinners and bestowal of blessings. Grace – as a nation, out of this terrible tragedy, God has visited grace upon us for he has allowed us to see where we’ve been blind. He has given us the chance, where we’ve been lost, to find our best selves.”¹

XVI. God does not fail. God takes our biggest fears and changes them into something glorious in the resurrection of Christ. Can we turn our backs to our fears and step out in faith, and in doing so “can we as the Christian community alter the conditions of people’s lives. Can we, too, bring healing into troubled circumstances?”²

XVII. I urge us to continue to step out in faith, disregard the fear that attempts to hold us back from living a life devoted to Christ, and believe in the hope

¹ President Barack Obama at the funeral of Rev. Clementa Pinckney, 2015 used in the conclusion of Meacham’s book.

² Emerson Powery, “Commentary on Mark 5:21-43,” Workingpreacher.com, 2012.

and truth found in Jesus, that we celebrate at this table. That is life altering, it is life sustaining, and it is the only way that we can build anything like a “city upon a hill” in our community.

XVIII. Have hope in the Lord, and step out in faith in response to the grace the Lord your God has given you.