

Cornel Barnett
Redwoods Presbyterian Church
Larkspur, California
May 3, 2015
Scout Sunday

Luke 14:28-32
“Wees Gereed/Allzeit Bereit”

Who can figure out my sermon title? What does “Wees Gereed” and “Allzeit Bereit?” mean?

“Wees Gereed” is South African Afrikaans for “Be Prepared” the Scout motto.

“Allzeit Bereit” is from Germany, Austria and Switzerland. It is also the scout motto but said differently. It means, “Always Prepared.”

The French say, “Toujours Prête” which means “Always Ready.” These are excellent ways of saying the scout motto and it’s what scouting is all about.

We have a head start in life if we learn to be prepared and always ready. Some of us learn from our mistakes. I learned from a major mistake. I was no cub scout and if I were a scout, I would not be telling you the following story.

I was a good surfer in my youth. I was confident and thought I could balance on any watercraft and I thought I could easily transfer from one craft to another.

In South Africa, where I grew up, I had friends who were excellent canoeists (called kayaks in the US) and they invited me to an outing on the Umkomaas River. I was in my late teens. When in full flow, the Umkomaas River is one of the most dangerous white water rivers in South Africa, which for me was no problem.

I bought a canoe and went for one practice run on the wide mouth of the Tugela River. It was easy paddling the canoe and I thought I was ready.

The day arrived and we went in two cars deep in African country. We arrived at the river and all I saw for the length of the river to the bend was raging white water about three feet high.

Our women friends drove our cars to an arranged meeting place about 15 miles downriver. My friend Roger was a South African canoe champion. He had one leg. We helped him into his canoe and he was off like a shot. My friend Rory went next. He paddled confidently in the river and round the bend. I got in to my canoe and pushed off and within seconds, I capsized and flew into the raging

waters. My canoe washed away and I slammed into into a huge boulder in the middle of the river with mounds of high-pressure water pinning me to the rock.

I climbed to the top of the rock and saw my canoe wedged in the bush downstream. My paddle had pierced spear-like into the opposite bank. I swam to my canoe only to discover that there was a huge gash in the hull. I tried to continue by paddling the canoe like a surfboard but once again, the rapids took the craft from me. I swam over to retrieve my paddle and looked downstream. My canoe had disappeared. I ran and swam downstream and this time the canoe had totally disappeared.

I decided to make my way to my friends before the sun went down. At one point, I ran across a field where the river meandered and passed an African man with horse and plow plowing his field with his wife behind sowing seeds. I greeted them as they looked bemused and I ran and swam on.

Towards the end of my stretch, I saw Rory carrying his canoe, which also received a gash. I helped him carry the canoe to the meeting place where Roger and friends were enjoying swims in the the river and basking in the sun.

It would have been good for me to heed the words of Jesus in the Gospel text today. He said:

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’

In other words, if you want to complete the job make sure, you have the money, goods and skills to complete it otherwise it would be incomplete. I didn't have a protector to prevent water from entering my canoe. I didn't even have a life jacket, a good idea even for the best of swimmers as I was at the time. I could have been much more prepared skill-wise. I'm glad my friends didn't ridicule me. We all thought it was a good laugh although I was sad I lost my kayak.

Jesus continues: “Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace.”

In other words, we honestly figure out beforehand whether we can win the battle. Don't be over confident and blind as I was and eat a bit of humble pie and make peace with your enemy while you can. You'll save many lives.

Jesus would make a good scout. He would definitely say. Wees Gereed, Allzeit Bereit, and Toujours Prête. He'd say, "Be prepared, always prepared, and always ready.

I could have learned a lot by being a cub or boy scout and by hearing and practicing the words of Jesus. Amen.