



**February 8, 2009**

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Sue Verboom

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Mark 1:29-39

## “Stand Up, Sit Down”

There’s a catchy, yet hokey, song that sometimes runs through my mind. I don’t remember the title, but the refrain repeats over and over, “Sit down, you’re rockin’ the boat.” The singer tells of dreaming he’s on a boat to heaven. Through the song, each time he brings something he shouldn’t on board, like gaming dice or cards, the passengers sing to him, “Sit down, you’re rockin’ the boat!” They warn him, “For the devil will drag under, by the sharp lapels of your checkered coat. Sit down! Sit down! Sit down, you’re rockin’ the boat!”

The image is familiar: the flashy, checkered-coat wearing, gambling, hard-drinking con artist--- out to grab all he can for himself, and heading down the road to perdition.

When I hear Paul’s words in our Epistle lesson for today, a checkered-coated figure comes to my mind. But not a sinning con-artist—no. I picture a fervent Christian proclaiming his faith loudly, set on saving the world. And I hear Paul tell this fellow quietly but firmly: “Sit down, sit down! Sit down, you’re rockin’ the boat.”

In the previous chapter of 1 Corinthians Paul issued a call to church members to put love above knowledge, concern for others ahead of being right. He warned them about being puffed up, conceited, and condescending. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up, he told them, and tells us.

Today’s reading goes on from there. Paul gives instructions about how to witness to the love of Christ; about how to invite others to hear the good news of Jesus. He

tells us how to put love as our first priority, rather than our own knowledge or expertise.

“Don’t wear a checkered coat,” Paul seems to say. Don’t draw attention to yourself. Don’t think of yourself as a “different breed” than the people around you. Recognize the many ways you are the same. Observe others with humility and respect. Be attentive to the styles of speaking and behavior that people are comfortable with. Follow their traditions and customs as you are able.

We think of Paul as a fearless missionary. And he was! We remember his beatings, imprisonment and close calls with angry authorities. We might think he had no concern for what anyone else thought of him. He was a firebrand--- but he was ALWAYS aware of other’s feelings and was sensitive to their ways.

In our text Paul proclaims he became like a Jew to win Jews, like one under the law to win the law-abiders, like one outside the law to win those outside. He became weak (not just LIKE the weak- notice that subtle difference) to win the weak. He became all things for the sake of the GOSPEL—to share the good news of God made known in Jesus Christ.

There is a temptation for Christians to think they have no need to be sensitive to others. There is a temptation for us to become arrogant, spiritually proud. To this checkered-coated style of witnessing Paul says, “Sit down. Sit down. Sit down, you’re rockin’ the boat!”

Have you had a powerful spiritual experience in your life? Sometimes retreats provide us with insights and excitement we can’t contain. I know this has happened to many people who have experienced the Walk to Emmaus retreat, or a Marriage Encounter retreat. We’re overflowing with a fiery energy that won’t let us sit down in the boat. But our energy bowls people over; they pull back from us; they are wary.

We may need to take time to learn more about our companions, in order to discern how to talk to them in ways they can hear. We need to follow Paul’s example.

But sometimes we need to test our experience, too, to be sure we are not deceived into thinking an experience or an insight comes from God when it does not. We may be jumpin’ all over the boat with excitement, when we are actually mistaken about something.

Doug Murren, in *The Baby Boomerang: Catching Baby Boomers as they Return to Church*, proposes a checklist of questions to consider when we have a thrilling experience or insight.

*---Has experiencing this spiritual gift or manifestation taken your will from you? If so, it is not from God.*

*---Is it peaceful? Is this phenomenon palatable and intelligible to other spiritual people?*

*--Has this experience glorified God? Is Jesus the center of your experience, or are you the center?*

*--Did this experience cause you to be respectful of others, or did it cause you to feel superior?*

*--Has this manifestation or insight strengthened your commitment to Christ and the Church?*

*--Has this experience caused you to be more concerned about others?*

*--Is this experience open to anyone? If you feel that it is for you only, it is probably not genuine, for God is no respecter of persons when it comes to spiritual experiences.*

Ours is such an active age. We feel we need to seize opportunities or they will pass forever. We feel we need to leap up and fix things, make things right, right now. It is good to be reminded by Paul there are many, many times when we are called to sit down and let the boat stabilize. We may need to sit down to assess the experiences and insights we want to share with others. We may need to sit down to observe our companions, to get to know them, so we can communicate our message in ways that are heard and clearly received.

I can't leave off here, however. As you may have noticed the sermon title is, "Stand up, sit down". I've addressed sitting down, what about standing up? That message comes through our gospel reading.

Simon Peter's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever when Jesus and his followers arrived at the house. "He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up." He lifted her up. He helped her to stand up. We don't know how serious a fever this was. We don't know that it was life-threatening; perhaps it was as simple as a cold or the 'flu. But given the cultural standards of her time and place she would have

been expected to get up out of bed and serve the men in the house unless she was practically dying. Jesus cared. Whether it was a serious illness or just enough to make it hard for her to prepare a meal---- Jesus cared. He provided healing strength to put her back on her feet.

Many things knock us off our feet—sometimes physical illness or injury, sometimes it's sorrow, frustration, or self-disgust. Sometimes it's exhaustion, despair or hopelessness. Jesus can help us get back on our feet—to stand up and be the person God made us to be.

As we follow Jesus through life, there will be both kinds of times: times to sit down, because we're rocking the boat; and times to stand up, freed from illness and demons that knock us off our feet.

Christians are often susceptible to the demon of self-disparagement. We're susceptible to BOTH: being puffed up and arrogant, and being laid low by seeing ourselves as worthless. **NEITHER IS GOD'S WILL!!** Jesus can lift us up and help us see the gifts God has planted in us, the beauty God sees in us. Our vision is so faulty when we look at ourselves.

There's a story about a man who decided to sell his farm. He hired an advertising company to write some copy describing the assets of the property. When they read back what they'd put together for the farmer, he said, "I'd like to hear it again." So the advertisers read it once more. After a pause, the farmer said, "Forget it. I'm not going to sell." Startled, they asked him why. The farmer answered, "I've wanted to own a place like that all my life!"

God invites us to stand up and look into the mirror of God's eyes. With the Holy Spirit's help we may be surprised by what we see and exclaim, "Why, that's the person I've wanted to be all my life!"

Sit down, my friends, sit down when you're rockin' the boat with insensitivity or arrogance. But stand up to see who God created you to be, and rejoice. God to serve Christ in all you do. Amen!