

**Christ Presbyterian Church**  
**Edina, Minnesota**  
**August 31 & September 1, 2013**  
**Matt Moberg**  
**Proverbs: Rescue**  
**Proverbs 24:11-12**

Good morning, church! How are we doing today? Good. Great! You people are fun. My name is Matt Moberg. As John [Pastor John Crosby] alluded, I head up The Table with Stephanie Spencer, who is my better half, vocationally speaking. It's good to be here. I've never spoken at a service this early in the morning before. The Adderall is just kicking in. The coffee is just starting to set in, so wish me luck.

We are at the end of our Proverbs series. I have loved this series. I don't know if it's been the same thing for you guys, but it's just changed the entire way I view the Proverbs. Unlike many of the Scriptures, the Proverbs are just straightforward words from God that have direct implications on our lives. You don't have to unpack. There is no mystery. They are not hidden behind a cloud of ambiguity. They are just these straightforward things that say, "Go and do this because I am the Lord." I love that. It's been a great time. I think John has led it well, teaching us how to listen and apply that head-to-hands type thing that the Proverbs leads us into. We are closing that out today, but before we do that, let's go into the time of praying real quick.

Jesus, Jesus, Lord God, I pray over this time together that we would use this time well and You would open our ears and open our hearts. Lord, teach us how to find You in these moments in the common hours. You are a good God, and we are grateful. And all God's children said, "Amen."

If you have your Bibles, they should be in the pews ahead of you, go to Proverbs 24, verses 10 through 12. It reads like this:

**10** If you falter in a time of trouble, how small is your strength! **11** Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. **12** If you say, "But we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay everyone according to what they have done?

That's some heavy text right there. Let me put a pause in the Scripture reading and tell you something about myself. I'm a musician. I love music. I collect music. And part of my infatuation with music is that I tie songs and sounds to almost everything I do. If I'm going to meet with Paul Tshihamba, there's a song that is inside my head. I don't know what that song is but I think about it. That's how my mind works. I tie songs to moments. For example, at the end of a long day when I've been slaving away for my superior, John Crosby, and he's just been cracking the whip and it's been an exhausting day, I step into my car and hear something like this. *[Music clip] Free at Last*. Finally the pain is coming to an end! Then I'll drive home. I make the trek a half-hour north of New Brighton and see my beautiful wife. I maybe run a comb through my little amount of hair that's left. I open that door and hear something like this. *[Music clip] Let's Get it*

*On.* You know, come on. I lower my voice and whisper a sweet word to her. I tell you this because as I've been sitting in this text in the Proverbs, this Proverbs 24:10-12, this is the song that's kind of been going with me. *[Music clip]* Who knows what this is? *Indiana Jones!* Last night we had somebody say *Chariots of Fire*. Somebody said *Eye of the Tiger*. No one ever said *Indiana Jones*. Nobody knew. That's *Indiana Jones!*

This text as I've been hearing the song is a call to be heroic. It is a call to rise above adversity. In the time of trouble, will you be the coward who shrivels up in the corner and says, "I didn't know what was going on. I had no idea people were dying on my watch"? Or are you going to be like Indiana Jones and crack a whip and bust into the Temple of Doom and save people? Be a rescuer, right? My idea is I start thinking about knights and dragons, the stories of old. I've been sitting in this text and reading it and listening and praying and trying to ask, "God, what is it You are trying to say?" This is it right here. You and I are called to be the knights slaying the dragons of evil in our world. It's a straightforward call. In this text in Proverbs 24:10-12 where it says, "Do not falter in the times of trouble," my question is, with all of the dragons out there, how do you handle yourself in the times of trouble? Are you acting like you had no idea what was going on? Or are you rising up and saying, "I need to do something, and I *will* do something"?

It's hard right now, I think, for all of us not to read this text and think about eleven days ago in Syria. We think about the 1,400 people who were gassed to death by their own government and wonder, where were the Christians holding back those who were being led to the slaughter? Who was standing in the way saying, "This cannot happen! This is a dragon of evil and this cannot take place." I know it's complicated. I know it's a big thing but I think this text reminds us that the call is very clear. Unlike the President of our country, we have no choice. We have to have boots on the ground, right? We have to be people of action. We have to be people who when we see evil, we respond because we are children of the King. That is what we have been commanded to do. When it comes to evil, we don't have an option. We are called to be people of action.

To ensure that we understand that the world is full of dragons, in our country, our state, our city, our neighborhoods, in our homes, let me lay out a couple of dragons right now that are haunting the Twin Cities. Just to make sure that none of us can actually get away with saying, "We knew nothing about it." The first one that comes to mind for me is human trafficking. Right now the FBI calls Minnesota the 13<sup>th</sup> worst state when it comes to human trafficking. Young boys and girls are being lured. It's actually happening a lot on the south side of the Twin Cities. Mall of America is a hot spot for this dragon to be hanging out. Young boys and girls are being lured into this, and they are losing their lives. That is a dragon that is in our midst. That is an evil that is in our faces. What are we doing about it? The times of trouble are now.

The second dragon that comes to mind for me is all the waiting children in Minnesota. We have 642 kids who are between the ages of 10 and 18, who are bouncing around foster homes. At some point they will be thrown out on the street and the government and the state will not have their backs anymore and they will be left to fend for themselves. There are 642 kids waiting for a family to say, "You can come and be with us and be one of our own." So 642 kids are waiting and we have perhaps more spare bedrooms in our homes than any culture before. Hmmm.

The last dragon I want to talk about is spiritual death. This Proverb is very vague about what kind of death it's talking about so let me include spiritual death. Right now in Minnesota, 62 percent of our state does not go to church. I know that knowing Christ and going to church don't

have to go hand in hand. You can know Christ and not go to church. I get that. But I do think a lot of times there is a linkage there. For me and maybe for you, the experience of the greatness of Christ, the love of Christ, and the beauty and freedom of the gift of eternal security is probably not the same as our friends.

I could go on and on because there are a lot of dragons we could be talking about, but I want to ask another question. How can we step inside the story? How can we step inside the hero's journey? When that time of trouble is near, how can we be people who don't respond like cowards, who rise up to the challenge and say, "We *will* do something because we *have* to do something?"

There is a book that was written in 1949 called *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. How many of you have heard of this book? We've got one person in here. That's super. Joseph Campbell wrote this book in 1949 and it's been a staple in writing and film classes ever since. It is an amazing book because it gives a more or less paint-by-numbers means of how the hero is formed -- the journey of the hero, the monomyth, as Campbell calls it. I want to talk about this because I think it's so true. We see it in our books. We see it in our movies. We see it in real life. We see it in the Bible. We see it in Jesus.

Let me breeze through this. This is the full model right here. [Slide shown] This is what it looks like. I'm mean, you can see on your own how Jesus fits into this. Jesus, the carpenter's son, is living in an **Ordinary World**, a nobody land. He gets a **Call to Adventure**. He gets baptized, reluctant to the call. He goes into the wilderness and is tempted by the devil. He gets through it. He knows who God is. Then He leads us to God, **Crossing the Threshold** into a **Special World**.

He comes back and there are **Tests, Allies, Enemies**. The disciples are His allies, and He definitely has His enemies. Then the **Approach to Inmost Cave**, the coming into Jerusalem, right? At the bottom there is the **Ordeal**, which you can't see right there, but it is the death, the going to the cross, paying the price, stepping into the cave and facing the dragon. That's Christ on the cross.

The **Reward** is after the **Resurrection**, is it not? On **The Road back** to the **Ordinary World**, Jesus' final day is spent with His disciples and His people. Then comes the **Return**. Jesus goes back to heaven. What He has brought is the eternal gift for His people, for all of us. Things will clearly never be the same again.

What I want to focus on tonight is act 1. [Series of slides] It all starts in the **Ordinary World**. This is Frodo in the Shire doing hobbit things. Reading in trees. That's what hobbits do apparently. This is Sister Mary Jo Copeland, one of my favorite people in Minneapolis. She grew up in an impoverished home, an abusive home. Children avoided her, she said, because she was covered in filth. This is King David out in the fields slinging stones, taking care of sheep, writing love songs on his harp. This is the **Ordinary World**. Our lives are run by routine, by the managing of the present, right? It's our to-do list of everything we've got to do to get from point A to point B. These are the common hours of our lives.

Then even after you receive the burden, forever after you've seen the dragon, you wake up and you realize your life as a bigger person. You are still going to have the common hours, but what you do with those common hours defines who you are in a lot of different ways. Mary Jo Copeland says, "How you spend your days is how you spend your life." What you are doing

today? That's how you are spending your life. You are always staying the ordinary though, in the *status quo*, if you don't take a moment to recognize that there are dragons amidst us and that you have a duty to have your boots on the ground and respond.

That second stage, the **Call to Adventure** or the waking up, as I want to call it this morning, is the realization that there are dragons in our midst. Realizing that we live in a world that's full of evil and disgusting things and knowing it's our job to respond. Dragons are scary. Reluctance comes right along with this. Something like human trafficking *should* scare you. Like, "Yeah, I want to do something about that but I don't know how." There is reluctance because that's a big thing. Homelessness. That's a big thing. That *should* scare you. There *should* be a spirit of reluctance there because that's a big thing.

For Frodo, this is Gandalf looking at him and saying, "The ring has chosen *you*." And Frodo saying something like, "I hate you. I don't want this. Get it out of here." Sister Mary Jo Copeland was burdened by the homeless in her community. She started working as a volunteer at Catholic Charities where she became even more burdened by the people she saw falling through the cracks. Her dragons were just pounding as she stepped into that action. For King David, it was realizing that he had a bigger purpose in life than just tending sheep. This is Samuel coming to him and saying, "I see your four brothers. Yeah, they're good. They're talented. They're gorgeous, but I want *you* to be the next king. You are the one I'm calling to be the next king." It's that idea where we wake up and start to understand what it is about the world that is burdening us. What are the needs of our neighbors? What are the needs of our family members? What is going on in Edina right now that is bothering you? What is going on in the Twin Cities that isn't right, that is not as it should be?

The next stage after the waking up is going to have a spirit of reluctance to it. Notice the dragons. Look for them. What gets you through that reluctance then is what comes next, the supernatural stage, the Meeting with the Mentor. That's an *and* usually more than an *or*. I mean again, this is Frodo and Gandalf. This Mary Jo Copeland, who wakes up every morning at 4:00 a.m. and prays at St. Alphonsus Church in Brooklyn Center. At four a.m. every morning, she gives the first hour to the Lord. She says, "I need You, God, so I will come to You first." This is David, who wrote the Psalms, his Book of Prayers. He is a shepherd boy saying, "The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not be in want because He is control. He is the one I go to."

So what keeps you from understanding that there are dragons out there, understanding that they are scary, and then understanding that you have a Gandalf and a God in your life? We've talked about this in the Proverbs, how important it is for you to have mentors, how important it is for you to have people who will be in your corner saying, "I know that cave that holds the dragon is scary, but people being led to death need to keep going." We've talked about how important it is to be disciplined in our faith, to be up with Mary Jo at 4:00 a.m. in the morning, looking for the Lord. It's not just being in that time of trouble, that moment of adversity, that moment of truth, and saying, "God, I need You now." It is in the common hours when you say, "God, I need You now." Do you see the difference between those two? It's important that we have these people in our corner.

The other side of it is that there is not a problem in this world, not a dragon in this world that God is not already working to slay. You are not dragging God into something that He is not already working on. He is busy but He is trying to get some help and is inviting you to know that no

matter what burden you are feeling, and it's your feeling you need to respond to, you do not go at it alone. God is already there, so join Him. Look for Him in that next stage.

The last stage is the moment of truth. It is our moment of action where we go from words to action. This is, again, the boots on the ground. I'm going to confess to something on behalf of my generation, the millennial generation, if you will. We are great at reading. We are great at learning and having conversations. We are great at small group studies about different issues, but we are not the best at jumping into action, that **Crossing the Threshold** moment. We're not! We're not the best at saying, "Yes, we know about this and now we have to go do something!" Then going and proceeding to do something. We struggle with that. But sympathy is not an excuse for action. It's just a pretty way to be a coward. I mean, feeling bad for something that's going on in your community, that's good, but it has to lead you to something else. The burden cannot stay as just words. It's got to lead to action.

So in that day of trouble the Proverb is talking about, will you be the hero who answers and says, "I will hold them back from death" or will you be the coward who says, "Well, I didn't actually know enough about it, I knew something about it but I didn't know enough about it"? This is where Gandalf tells Frodo, "You need to take that ring and you need to bring it to the mountain. You need to destroy it. And if it gets into the wrong hands, evil will win." And so Frodo goes. This is where Mary Jo Copeland, after being burdened, started Sharing and Caring Hands which changed the Twin Cities in amazing ways. She recently was awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal, one of the highest honors an American citizen can receive. An amazing story. She says, "For just such a time as this, we were put on this earth to listen to the voice of God and do His holy will." That is a bold statement. For such a time as this, I was put on the earth to do *this* because it is God's holy will. It is a question for us to be asking ourselves, what is that for me? There is a constant Goliath out in the field. This is David telling the king he will go and fight that monster.

When all is said and done, all these people had these hero's journeys. They left and pursued the dragons they knew were out there and they didn't stop until those dragons were dead. And they won't stop until the dragon is dead because they realize as followers of Christ, this is not an optional thing for us. We are called to respond to evil. We cannot be passive because too many people are emotionally, psychologically, physically, spiritually dying.

I almost had a hero's journey once. Thankfully, the good Lord has given me many other opportunities, but there was one a few years back. I was working for TreeHouse. I was taking some teenagers up to northern Cheyenne country, out in Montana, to a place called Reindeer. We were there for a week or two, and I was just astounded at the poverty, the addictions, to just the overall depression. They were facing so much and when I left, I felt a divine -- and I do not use that word lightly -- I felt a divine burden to do something about it, to respond. I wanted to actually go and live there. But then I thought, "I don't know what I could do. I don't know what I could bring. I'm not that talented." I felt that call, "Matt, you need to go and be among those people. You need to be a part of the solution and not just be a person from Minnesota who whines about it. You need to go and be a part of the solution."

I came home and I prayed about it, and I talked with my mentors about it. I vowed over and over again that I should go and do that, but when the moment of truth came, the **Crossing the Threshold** moment, I said, "I'm not good enough. I don't have anything to do. I'm scared." And I went back home. That's probably one of the biggest regrets that I have in my life. Full

disclosure. I regret so much that I turned my back on a holy burden that God put on me and said that I wasn't enough.

Frankly, though, we serve Jesus Christ and God is great. It doesn't matter how many times we've played the coward, He doesn't give up on us, does He? Look at the story of Peter. Jesus looks at Peter and says, "Peter, you are the rock upon which I'm going to build my church." Peter turns his back on Jesus and says, "I don't know Him," and Christ continues to build His church on Peter. Jesus continues to stick it out with Him. You may have burdens that you have passed on where you have played the coward and that's okay because Christ says, "There is a new tomorrow. There will be a new burden, and there will still be dragons to slay."

I want to end with three challenges that I think come from the hero's journey, the first one being that **you need to hunt for dragons**. What I mean by that is, you need to actually be intentional about learning about what is going on in your community. Have conversations with people. Watch the news. Learn about what is going on in our Twin Cities, our country, our world. Karl Barth, one of my favorite theologians says this: "Hold the Bible in one hand, and hold the newspaper in the other and understand what is going on in our own context." You have to be looking. You have to be intentional about it. My brother is a professional elk hunter out in Colorado. He leads groups and would be the first to tell you that we can't effectively hunt the dragons if we are busy watching reality TV and posting statuses on Facebook. We have to be an informed people. Part of the calling to be a hero is to actually open up our eyes and see what's going on around us.

The second thing is that **you need God and you need your Gandalf**. Are you leaning into God? Are you pressing into Him right now in the common hour? "God, I need You. God, I need you to lead me. God, I need You to hold me. God, I need You to break my heart with what is busting open Yours." Are you being with Mary Jo Copeland, getting up at four in the morning, reading and praying and leaning into the holy? "I need you, Gandalf." You need to say what your burden is out loud because if you keep it quiet, if you keep it inside, you can abort that burden real quickly. We went to the Global Leadership Summit this summer. Bill Hybels talked about that. He said, "Once you are feeling a vision or burden for something, once you are feeling there is something you must do, you can let that go really easily in the quiet, in the secret, if you never let anyone else know you are feeling that way." Let somebody else know. Speak it out loud to someone and have that person in your corner.

The last thing is this. You need to **hunt with discipline** now in the common hours. Frodo had to go through many morphs before he got to the mountains, and you are going to have to pass many ants before you get to the dragon. But if the dragon is defining your day, you need to say, "This dragon is out there, and I'm going to get him. I will stay the course while things get mundane, while things get vanilla. I will keep practicing because it's too important that people are going out and dying on my watch. I am a Christian. I am a follower of Christ Jesus, who intervened on our behalf and led us back from death. Because of what He did, how much are my boots on the ground? Every day I'm going to spend my moments well. Whether they are common hours or not, it doesn't matter. It's never common if the dragon is out there. I'm walking toward the dragon whether that cage is tomorrow or it's a year down the road when I actually get to him."

I think that David shows so well what it looks like when you live a disciplined life. This is in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 17. David was kind of a cheese boy and has been asked by his dad to go to the battle

and bring cheese and bread to his brothers, "Go and feed your better brothers." David goes there and he hears the taunts of Goliath. He goes to King Saul and says, "Well, what's going on? Why aren't we doing something?"

**32** David said to Saul, "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him." **33** Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are little more than a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth."

As you leave here, step into your burdens and start taking account of what is God putting on you that you need to respond to? What is bugging you about the neighborhood? What is something you can do? You are going to have inner voices and outer voices that say you are not good enough. You are too young. You are too small. You are too dumb. You are going to have these voices that say you are inadequate. You are a failure. This is why we need to be disciplined in our common hours.

**34** But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, **35** I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it.

Think about seizing a lion or a bear by its hair. Love this guy.

**36** Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them . . . .

If we are disciplined in the common hours, if we are walking with God and with Gandalf and looking for the dragons out there, we are going to say, "We killed the lion and we killed the bear and the dragon is not going to be any different." How are you spending your days to rid the world of evil? This is a big question. The church, the chosen people of the Lord, is called to be heroic. That is our calling. Let me end with this. There is a letter that I carry around with me. It's in my bag every day and it's one of the most important writings in my life. It was written in a Birmingham jail cell by a man by the name of Martin Luther King, Jr. I think what he writes within his cell, within the place where he is, is because he is trying to hold others back from death, and I think it is a profound word for this church in this moment, today. He says this:

There was a time when the church was very powerful—in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Whenever the early Christians entered a town, the people in power became disturbed and immediately sought to convict the Christians for being "disturbers of the peace" and "outside agitators." But the Christians pressed on, in the conviction that they were "a colony of heaven," called to obey God rather than man. Small in number, they were big in commitment. They were too God intoxicated to be "astronomically intimidated." By their effort and example they brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contests.

Things are different now. So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is an arch defender of the status quo. Far from being

disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent—and often even vocal—sanction of things as they are.

But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century.

I don't want this to be a social club. I don't want to go to a church that is just a social club. We are God's people. We are called to be the ones who are slaying the dragons, so as we leave here, could we start wondering where the dragons are? Could we start looking? Could we start leaning into God and finding our Gandalf? Could we start embracing discipline? There is far too much at stake to do anything else. We don't have a choice in this. We are called to have boots on the ground. Let me pray.

Jesus, the world is a scary place. God, I pray for burdens on all of us. I pray that You would break our hearts, that You would call us in adventure, that You would give us courage to cross the threshold. Jesus, I pray that we would look to You, and that You would speak and we would listen. God, You are good. You are so good, and we are so grateful that the victory is already Yours. You have beaten death and all the dragons that come with it. Thank You, Jesus, for who You are, and all God's children say, "Amen."

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*

