

## The Hero's Journey

On Sunday, we began a three-part sermon series on the Jewish high holy days, starting with Rosh ha-Shana, which marks the New Year on the Hebrew calendar.

1. Warm-up Question: If you were able to be at our outdoor worship on Sunday, how did it feel to be back in the presence of one another again? What most blessed you on Sunday?
2. The first day of the New Year on the Hebrew calendar is Tishre 1 [TISH-ree], which occurred this past Sunday. In Jewish liturgy, Rosh ha-Shana marks the birthday of the world, reminding us of the work God did in creation long ago and the continuing creative work of God in the world today.
  - a. In Christian thought, the idea of celebrating the world's birthday on a particular day is novel. Do you think it's a good idea? Why or why not?
  - b. Biblically, Rosh ha-Shana is traced back to Leviticus 23:24, where God told Moses, "Speak to the people of Israel, saying: In the 7<sup>th</sup> month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of complete rest, a holy convocation commemorated with blasts from the shofar [SHOW-faar]." Rabbi Michael Strassfeld says, "The blast of the shofar is meant to awaken our slumbering souls to time's passage and . . . to what we could do with our lives." The blast of a horn is very symbolic. It reminds us that change and new beginnings often happen suddenly and unexpectedly. As you look back over the last few years of your life, what has been the most surprising change thrust into your life?
  - c. Joseph Campbell said, "The hero's journey always begins with leaving home." What do you think Campbell means? What does he mean by "leaving home" and why does he call it the "hero's journey?"
3. The life of Jesus exemplifies the hero's journey. Jesus had a high and holy call on his life. But to live into that calling, he literally had to leave home. Read Luke 4:14-30.
  - a. Why do you think the people of Jesus' hometown were so resistant to his ministry?
  - b. Forced out of Nazareth, Jesus moved to Capernaum and began his ministry there. One thing led to another: miracles, large crowds, and fierce resistance from the religious elite. Jesus' journey ultimately took him to Jerusalem and crucifixion. Ironically, his death repositioned him for his greatest triumph: the resurrection. When the women arrived at Jesus' tomb on the morning of the third day, an angel told them, "Jesus has risen. . . . ***Go and tell his disciples . . . that he is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.***" Mark 16:6. Jeff said, "Jesus never walks behind us. Sometimes he walks beside us. But most often he walks ahead of us, beckoning us to dare to step out of what is and into what can be."

Have you found this to be true in your own life? Right now, do you sense Jesus calling you to step into something new in your life?

- c. In an article on LinkedIn, Maria Stenvinkel reported the results of interviews with hundreds of people across the globe where she asked, “What’s your greatest fear in life?” She was surprised at how many feared that fear itself might hold them back from living fully. Ralph of North Brunswick, NJ, said, “My greatest fear is regretting all that I didn’t do, as I lay in my hospital bed as an elderly man.” If your life were to end right now, what would you most regret not doing?
4. In an episode of “This American Life” on PBS, Ira Glass asked a room of one hundred people to think back to the beginning of adulthood when they were first formulating a plan for their lives. He called this their Plan A. He then asked how many were still following their Plan A. Only one person was, and she was only 23. Everyone else had been forced to move onto Plan B, C, D, or Z. What was your Plan A as a young adult? Are you still following it?
5. When Jewish synagogues celebrate Rosh ha-Shana, they typically read the Hebrew Scripture that describes Sarah’s miraculous birth of Isaac in her old age. The story reminds us of God’s surprising creative work in our lives. We Christians have a similar story in the New Testament – the story of Mary, mother of Jesus. Read Luke 1:26-38.
  - a. As a young woman, what was Mary’s Plan A?
  - b. What emotions do you imagine Mary experienced when the angel blasted away her Plan A?
  - c. Why do you think Mary so readily embraced Plan B, i.e., birthing a child out of wedlock?
  - d. Years later looking back, how do you think Mary felt about Plan B?
6. On Sunday, Jeff asked, “When change is thrust into your life, do you typically embrace it with faith and expectation or with resentment and resistance?”
  - a. How would you answer that question?
  - b. What do you think Jeff meant when he said, “The quality of your life will turn largely on how you respond to change?”
  - c. Are you feeling called to any attitude adjustments about changes happening in your life right now?