

A Sermon Preached at Maple Street Congregational Church, UCC  
Danvers, MA  
Rev. Kevin M Smith  
July 2, 2017  
Matthew 10:38-42 (from *The Message*)

### *Out There and In Here*

Anyone around in the 1960's remembers the challenge that President Kennedy put before the country—to land a man on the moon within ten years. (Too bad he didn't say land a woman on the moon, then he really would have set a challenge before the country to do more than just land on the moon!) If you go on the NASA web page you come across a statement entitled, "Why we explore." Here is what it says:

*Why we explore: Human Space Exploration*

*Humanity's interest in the heavens has been universal and enduring. Humans are driven to explore the unknown, discover new worlds, push the boundaries of our scientific and technical limits, and then push further. The intangible desire to explore and challenge the boundaries of what we know and where we have been has provided benefits to our society for centuries...*

*([https://www.nasa.gov/exploration/whyweexplore/why\\_we\\_explore\\_main.html#.WT\\_aMhPysg4](https://www.nasa.gov/exploration/whyweexplore/why_we_explore_main.html#.WT_aMhPysg4))*

For those of you who were around in 1969, I bet many of you were watching the television broadcast of astronaut Neil Armstrong actually jump off the lunar module and set foot on the surface of the moon for the first time. We recall the famous quote, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." (Actually, there is debate about whether he actually said "for man" or whether he said "for a man." Armstrong claimed it was the latter. But, we can deal with that in another sermon... Of course, I wish he would have said "human" and "humankind," but, hey, regardless, this was a big deal that all started when some human being a long time ago looked up into the stars and began wondering what its like up there.) We humans are prone, thank God, to dreaming big dreams and having high hopes.

It's a great thing to have high hopes and big dreams. In fact, I would argue that having the capacity to have big dreams actually helps a person be able to hope. Christianity is a faith that has always had high hopes. Just think about all the images of Jesus floating into the heavens. Or, the thought that God, or our religious ancestors, were all up there in the heavens pulling the strings of we human beings grounded on earth set here to do their bidding. Often when some of us pray we lift our face upward to the sky as if looking to God for help, for deliverance. Of course, we also just as often, perhaps even more, bow our heads, in humility and submission to God. My point, though, is that to be a Christian, really to be any person of faith, we tend to have big dreams that give us hope for the future no matter how hard our present circumstances are in the moment. Christians dream really big because we possess a faith that believes that our leader was not only resurrected, but we tell stories to ourselves and others about Jesus actually coming back in the flesh after he died and was resurrected. In our story, Jesus didn't just come back to life after he died and immediately ascend into heaven, no, he hung around with his friends for a while. He even made breakfast for them on the beach one day. (Now that it's summer time, doesn't that sound fun to get out there early in the morning

and have breakfast on the beach? Perhaps we should move the time of these summer worship services to 6 am and then all go out to Crane's Beach and have breakfast? What do you say?) Well, maybe we will just stick to our communion meal here this morning...

In the reading of the scripture lesson this morning from *The Message* version of the Bible we heard Jesus say, "This is a large work I've called you into, but don't be overwhelmed by it. It's best to start small. Give a cool cup of water to someone who is thirsty, for instance. The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true apprentice. You won't lose out on a thing." We've all heard the quote from Lao Tzu which proclaims, "the journey of a thousand miles begins with one small step." Jesus knew this very well. God knew this very well. After all, according to our Christian story God didn't send a fully-formed king of the universe, or Roman emperor, or President of the United States. No the presence and manifestation of the Godself came to us in the birth of a little, vulnerable, baby born to peasant parents in an occupied territory. If this was happening today Jesus would have probably been born in Aleppo, Syria. And, his parents probably would have been some of the refugees trying to come to the United States for safety and begin their new lives. Let us all be aware of whom we might be welcoming and entertaining...they just might be angels, God's messengers.

As we embark on our visioning effort this coming fall, we begin with small steps. Literally, I tell you small steps. We're going to be asking everyone who is able to take some "prayer walks" around town, around the church, to prayerfully and with great awareness look around and report back to the vision team what you experienced, what you saw, what you felt, what you talked about with your prayer walking partners. The vision team is going to be asking you all to pray a lot throughout this process. Our vision work is not just about putting together a strategic business plan; it's so much more than that. We are asking the whole church to pray together in the sanctuary, in your committee meetings, in your fellowship times, in your homes, to pray for insight, and vision, and hope, and the messages of where God is leading Maple Street Church. I'm going to break the news to you right now, take this down, and put it in the headlines of your daily news. You heard it here first. Read all about it: "God already has a vision for Maple Street Church!" Yes, God has a vision already for where we should go, who we should be. The visioning work we are going to be doing is not just deciding what your vision is for the church. No, it's discovering what is God's vision for Maple Street Church! We can only do this through prayer and deep discernment by every individual of this church and in collectively in every meeting of this church whether it be the Council, the Trustees, the Deacons, Flower Committee, or in the four congregational meetings we will be having over the course of this next church year.

One step at a time folks. One small step for each Maple Street Church member, one giant leap of faith for us all. We need you to join in. Please do. Amen.

