**Breakthrough - Week 5 – Faith (Commitment Sunday)**

**Message Big Idea**: The Spirit brings breakthrough when we courageously step forward in faith.

**Scripture:** Acts 9,Acts 21:10-36, Philippians 3:1-11, Philippians 1:21

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**Breakthrough Introduction**

*(Breakthrough Initiative Graphic)* Today is a big day in the life of COMMUNITY! And if you are a newcomer you picked a great day to join us! And here is why - - at the close of today’s message you are going to see just how much the people of this church love this community and love people.

The reason I say that is because at the end of my message, I’m going to invite everyone who calls COMMUNITY their church to come forward with 1) a special gift 2) and a commitment of what they’re willing to give above and beyond their normal contribution to the church over the next 3 years in order to help people find their way back to God.

*(Hold envelope up)* When you came in you got a *(picture)* **commitment card/envelope**. Take a look at it now and let me explain how this will work:

* There is a place for you to write in what you are giving as a one-time gift today – whether you write a check or you gave online, write that amount in.
* And as we learned in the video earlier, today is also the day we celebrate the four teams of Celebration Generosity! Our four teams are a critical part of Breakthrough - in fact, the first 10 percent of commitments will be given to the four teams - which could be the largest gift for Celebration Generosity ever! - and we are praying for exactly that!
* There is also a place for you to write in what you are committing to give above and beyond your normal giving over the next three years to our Breakthrough initiative.

Newcomers, let me tell you a little about this special 3-year initiative called *(Graphic)* **Breakthrough**. We are committing to give generously so that more and more people can experience a breakthrough in their lives: it might be a spiritual breakthrough, relational breakthrough, or emotional breakthrough. These gifts will help us reach even more children, students, and adults and also start new churches in places where there are very few churches helping people find their way back to God.

It’s a very big day! So, turn to the person next to you and say, “This IS a big day!” *(This IS a big day)*

And like most big days in our lives, today will challenge us to step forward in faith. Today is a day for us to open ourselves up to the leading of the Holy Spirit and allow him to inspire us to courageously move forward.

**Free Solo**

Watching people courageously move forward is inspiring, isn’t it? One of the most riveting films I’ve see this year was **Free Solo** *(theater poster)*. It is absolutely stunning and mind-blowing! Free Solo is this amazing documentary about professional rock climber, Alex Honnold, who attempts to be the first person to conquer a free solo climb of the famed El Capitan in Yosemite National Park. *(El Capitan)*El Capitan is a 900-metre vertical rock face. Look at that! It’s intimidating!And Honnold attempts to climb it free solo! That means no ropes, no harness, no carabiners, AND no help – he’s on his own!

* Some would see it as reckless.
* Some would view it as senseless.
* Some would argue it was too much.

In fact, in the last 100 years, 121 people have tried to climb El Capitan *with* ropes, *with* harnesses, and *with* the help of others -- and 31 of them have died! No one has ever tried to free solo El Capitan. Yet that is what Alex Honnold sets out to do. And then on top of it, he asks his friends to video the whole climb so he can turn it into a documentary! His friends are scared to death they are going to be filming him falling to his death!

How many of you have seen **Free Solo**? *(show of hands)* Oh my, it’s riveting! Let me give you just a glimpse…

**Video: 20-30 seconds of video from Free Solo**

*(Alex Honnold climbing)* Told you!

What struck me most about Alex Honnold was that first, he was absolutely fearless! And second, his absolutely clarity about what he wanted to trade his life for. Climbing El Capitan was the most important thing in his life. It was more important than life! If he died, he died! Here it is in his words:

**“Each day, there is a chance you might die. And there's nothing wrong with that. Every living being on Earth is facing that same existential rift.” –Alex Honnold**

And because he knew what he was trading his life for, he just wasn’t afraid.

**Trading Your Life**

Honnold knew exactly what he was willing to trade his life for. And it’s interesting -- once you know exactly what you want to trade your life for, the fear starts to dissipate because every other decision becomes so much more obvious! I think the biggest difference between Alex Honnold and most of us is that he knows exactly what he wants to live and die for and most of us never get real clear about that!

But here’s the truth that I’m coming to grips with: **We ALL trade our life for something!** All of us do. We either trade our life all at once in like Alex Honnold was willing to do OR we trade our lives one day at a time for something over the course of 78.96 years. We are all like Alex Honnold in that we will trade our lives for something. Either on purpose or just by default.

* Some of us trade our years here on earth to accumulate as much money as we possibly can.
* Some of us trade all of our days looking for the acceptance and love of those around us.
* Some of us will live our 79 years and exchange it for 2-3 major accomplishments.
* Some of us spend our whole lives and never get clarity about what we will live or die for.

Martin Luther King, Jr. understood the importance of this. He said:

**“If you haven’t found something you are willing to die for, you aren’t fit to live.” – Martin Luther King Jr.**

When I finished watching **Free Solo** I was left with this question: “Dave, what are you willing to trade your life for?” I’m not sure there is a more important question!

So, let me ask you, “**What are you trading your life for?**” (2x) I think this is one of the most profound questions we can ask ourselves. Because, if you can get clear on the answer to that question, fear dissapears and everything else in your life just becomes obvious.

**Word: Acts 21**

During this Breakthrough series, we’ve been on a journey through the book of Acts learning how God was at work in the lives of the early Christ-followers. We’ve seen some amazing things happen in their lives! Incredible breakthroughs happened in individuals and in the church as a whole. One of the leaders of this movement was a guy named Paul.

Now outwardly Paul seemed very accomplished and secure. Here is how he describes himself:

**“If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.” -Philippians 3:4b-6**

Paul sounds like a guy who feels secure and successful, but he’s actually describing a period in his life when he was operating out of fear. Before Paul met Jesus, the movement of Christ-followers that continued to swell and grow felt threatening to him. He was afraid they would take his power, rob him of his treasured traditions, and take his place of influence. So, out of fear and anxiety he began persecuting followers of Jesus.

My guess is many of us can relate to this feeling of fear. I know I can. Maybe on the outside it looks like you’ve got it all together. People might even be praising you for your successes. Yet inside you are anxious. You might not even realize that fear is driving most of your decisions.

That was Paul. But then he has a dramatic encounter with God. *(Acts 9:3-5)*While on the way to a city named Damascus to persecute more followers of Jesus, Paul, who is also known as Saul, meets Jesus and has a breakthrough! Everything about his life changes in an instant when he realizes the truth that Jesus is Lord!

*(Acts 9:20-22)*Paul goes from the guy who persecuted followers of Jesus to Jesus’ most passionate spokesperson! He has such a remarkable breakthrough that at first people are skeptical as to whether or not this is even the same guy they knew before! Have you ever witnessed someone go through that radical of a transformation? I mean, I feel transformed when I lose 5 pounds, but with Paul it was a whole life transformation!

And with this transformation, Paul gets tremendous clarity about what he will trade his life for. Writing to the church in Philippi, Paul declares:

**“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” -Philippians 1:21**

Jesus is now everything to Paul! He will live for Jesus, and he’s willing to die for Jesus. And once he became clear on what he was willing to trade his life for, fear disappeared and every other decision in Paul’s life became obvious.

Maybe you’re sitting there thinking, “How do I know what I’m willing to trade my life for?” Let me tell you. When you’re so singularly focused on something that you’re willing to push past the fear no matter the risks or challenges, that’s what you’re willing to trade your life for it. Let me give you an example from Paul’s life.

In Acts 21, we find Paul at the end of three long journeys where he has taken the message of Jesus to far off places and started churches there. Now he is on his way back to Jerusalem, which was where this whole Jesus mission started. As he’s preparing to return to Jerusalem, a prophet approaches him with a warning:

**“After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, ‘The Holy Spirit says, “In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.”’” Acts 21:10-11**

Now, I’m not sure how your friends warn you about not going somewhere, but this seems extreme. I think I would just be more comfortable with someone sending me a YELP review or just sharing what a friend said about a place. But maybe this prophet thought Paul was a visual learner so he ties himself up and says, “This is what will happen to you in Jerusalem!” Crazy!

If I’m Paul, at this point, I’d jump on Travelocity and cancel my flight to Jerusalem. Seems like the right thing to do, right? *(Acts 21:12)* In fact, that’s what all of Paul’s friends begged him to do. It’s like Alex Honnold’s friends pleading, “Don’t do it; don’t climb that cliff.” It likely would have been enough to make me back off, but not Paul. He was crystal clear on what he was willing to trade his life for so…

**”Then Paul answered, ‘Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’” Acts 21:13**

Paul’s life was about one thing: Jesus. And that meant he would stop at nothing to move the mission of Jesus forward! In spite of the threatening circumstances, Paul was determined to move forward.

* Some would see it as reckless.
* Some would view it as senseless.
* Some would argue it was too much.

But for Paul there was only one thing that mattered: Jesus. His whole life was about Jesus. He knew what he was willing to trade his life for.

**“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” -Philippians 1:21**

Paul’s life was so consumed with Jesus that he didn’t care if the risks he took brought death. “If I’m alive, it’s all about Jesus! If I die, then even better because I’ll be with Jesus!”

* Fear didn’t stop him, because he had Jesus!
* Uncertainty didn’t deter him, because he had Jesus!
* Warnings didn’t discourage him, because he had Jesus!

He was willing to risk it all for the sake of Jesus!

**No Fear**

I want to go back to the Free Solo documentary about Alex Honnold. There was one more fascinating detail that I didn’t mention. After all of Alex’s amazing accomplishments, scientists were curious about what, if anything, was different about Alex’s brain that enabled him to accomplish this extraordinary feat. So, they asked if they could do an MRI. He agreed. And here is what they found.



* This scan on the left is the brain of Alex Honnold.
* The scan on my right is the brain of another climber of the same age.

Both were shown an image like El Capitan.

There is a part of the brain that receives information, and when that image is threatening or intimidating, it triggers the brain to create the emotion of fear.

* Notice on the scan on the right that this part of the brain is glowing bright yellow! That is called the amygdala or the brain’s fear center – and the bright yellow shows that he is feeling fear.
* Now look at the same spot for Alex Honnold – nothing! He feels nothing! It’s like he’s in a hammock in his backyard! ☺

What the scientists discovered is that Alex’s brain simply doesn’t respond like a normal person’s brain. Alex simply doesn’t feel fear in the same way you and I would. There’s just something different about him, and this is what allows him to do incredible things that would scare the rest of us to death!

**Holy Spirit**

But you know what? The Apostle Paul says there is something different about us too. There is something different about followers of Jesus that empowers us to push back fear and uncertainty and move forward in faith. In fact, this “something different” has been the key person throughout the story of Acts: the Holy Spirit! The very Spirit of God who lives within every Christ-follower. Paul explained it to a younger, sometimes frightened follower named Timothy like this:

**“For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.” – I Timothy 1:7**

When the Holy Spirit breaks through into our lives, he gives us the faith to move forward even in the face of fear. He makes us different than we were before. He makes us different than those who do not have the Spirit! And I believe that God wants to break through into our lives and into our church like never before. I believe he wants to do things he’s never done before. Things that are the work and power of his fearless Spirit, living inside of us and moving among us!

I believe the Holy Spirit wants to bring breakthrough today!

* A Breakthrough in People! In our lives and among entire communities.
* A Breakthrough in Places! Moving the mission forward in the places we live.
* A Breakthrough in Plants! The spread of the mission through church planting.

Here’s what I know: When people pray, God breaks through. He breaks through and begins to invite us to join him in moving the mission forward. He breaks through and calls us to trade our lives for Jesus and his mission.

**Trading Your Life**

*(TP tell your story of why you are willing to trade your life for Jesus and the mission)* It’s interesting, in some ways this church may not be around if it wasn’t for someone aksing this question. I remember when I was in college that I started wrestling with the question of “What am I willing to trade my life for?” And the more I thought about it and the more I prayed about it, I only got one answer: helping people find their way back to God. And from that time, myself and Jon and bunch of college friends found the courage to come back to Chicago and plant a church! God gave us a “spirit, not of fear and timidity, but of power and love!”

Are you willing to trade your life for Jesus and his mission? Are you willing to move the mission forward no matter what so that more people can find their way back to God?

I believe that God, through the Holy Spirit, wants to break through in each of our lives and to permeate this church! And when he does, we will be afraid of nothing. Nothing!

It’s worth trading your life for! I’ve experienced it! Thousands of others here at Community have experienced it! Now it’s time to help thousands more experience it.

Right now, like Paul, like so many followers before us let the Spirit of God break through and allow you to do things you could never do on your own. Allow us to accomplish things we never could on our own.

Let God breakthrough.

Let’s pray

*(Prayer and band comes to the stage and begins playing)*

**Commitment Time**

In just a moment I’m going to ask you to stand and invite everyone who calls COMMUNITY their church home to come to the front and bring this envelope with 1) their one time gift and 2) 3-year commitment to the Breakthrough Initiative.

By the way, if this is your church and for some reason you’re not ready to bring your gift forward, I don’t want you to feel embarrassed about that at all. But here is what I would ask you to do: go home and discuss this and pray about this decision, and Monday morning mail in this pre-paid envelope or get on our website and make your gift and commitment. Make sure to get it back to the church this week, because we want you to be a part of this great Breakthrough.

For me? I’ve been looking forward to this moment. And here is why – these causes I’m giving to are exactly what I want to trade my life for. I want to help people find their way back to God!

For all of you who call COMMUNITY your church home – I would encourage you to give. And here is why: It’s not about how much. Just do whatever God wants you to do. But the reason I want you to give is because I don’t want you to miss out in being a part of something really special that makes my life and your life significant! It’s worth trading your life for!

So now our worship team will come and they are going to play for the next couple minutes and then I will come back up and ask you to come forward.

**(Band plays for 3 minutes)**

God is about to use us to breakthrough – into the lives of kids, students, and people far from him. He is about to use us to breakthrough by creating spaces at our ten locations that will help people find their way back to God. And he is about to use us to break through and start new churches in prisons and in places all over Chicago to help even more people find their way back to God!

So as the band lead us in this song come forward and join me as we all make our gifts together.

**Communion Idea**

We’re doing things a little differently this morning. We’re going to take Communion here up front today. This is a big day in the life of our church, and we wanted to be reminded up front of why we’re here. We’re here because of Jesus. This is all because of Jesus. We believe that it’s because of Jesus that we can be restored and have a full life. We believe it’s because of Jesus that we can overcome our fears and failures. We believe it’s because of Jesus that death doesn’t get the final say. In Communion we remember Jesus and his life, death, and resurrection. We remember He gave up his life so that we could have life.

**“God made him who had no sin to be sinfor us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” -2 Corinthians 5:21**