

“Getting Dropped”

The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – May 22, 2022

Acts 16:9-15 and John 14:23-29

I have been riding my bike for many years. There is something comforting about riding. To me it is like true communion with God. We are together, in sync, and feeling each other’s presence. While I prefer to ride alone, I don’t mind riding in small groups. But large groups are not my style, and I am always so fearful of getting dropped.

"Getting dropped" sounds painful, but, if you're a cyclist, the main damage, such as it is, is to your ego.

In cycling, getting dropped has nothing to do with falling off one's bicycle, which has its own lingo (kissing the tarmac, taking an endo, sanding the asphalt, doing a hand plant, etc.).

Getting dropped is when you are riding with other cyclists but can't maintain the pace the group is pedaling. So, you fall behind. If you can't catch up, the gap widens and eventually, you are so far behind that you're either pedaling solo or you've been overtaken by a slower group. In some cases, even the slower group is too fast, and you get dropped a second time!

Virtually every cyclist who rides with a group, has been dropped at one time or another. Even the strongest riders have off days. Getting dropped is a humbling experience but also a learning experience.

Kelly Krause is a 33-year-old publicist from Austin, Texas. She's been cycling regularly for only two years and was 100 pounds heavier than she is now when she started. She said, "When I first started, I got dropped -- a lot. I don't see it as a failure. I approach every ride as a learning experience. When I look up the road as the group rides away from me, I don't panic. I simply watch as other riders also pop off the back. Then I work my hardest to catch them. Every time, I make it a little farther. It's the tiny victories that keep me going."

Haley Weaver, 22, a student from Austin, Texas, tells of showing up for an organized ride the first time without any knowledge of what group rides are all about. She was on a steel single-speed bike wearing leggings and a T-shirt. The other riders were dressed in spandex and had multi-gear light weight bikes. Needless to say, she got dropped on the first climb, but one of the other riders slowed down and hung with her. When she gasped, "I'm going to die!" the rider spoke words of encouragement and slowed even more. When she finally got to the top, she found the rest of the group waiting for her.

In some Christian circles, the term "left behind" is reserved to describe the location of those who are not taken into heaven during the second coming. We could say, perhaps, that they've been outdistanced by the faithful crowd and "dropped."

But the Gospel text for today suggests "getting dropped" in a positive sense. The scene is the Last Supper, where Jesus is preparing his disciples for what is soon to come. He talks about what loving him means going forward, and then adds, "*I HAVE SAID THESE THINGS WHILE I AM STILL WITH YOU.*"

But just a few verses later he adds, "*I AM GOING AWAY ...*" In effect, Jesus tells the disciples that he is, in the cycling sense, "dropping" them, and they will be left behind to carry on the Gospel proclamation without him. John 14:1-31 is preparing the disciples for life without Jesus. For the disciples, the ongoing endeavor of following Jesus would have a whole different feel without him physically present with them.

Mind you, he didn't leave them alone, he also talks about the Holy Spirit coming to teach them what they need and to remind them of Jesus' words. They were to continue the ministry of Jesus with the power that Jesus had through the Holy Spirit.

And isn't that where we, who follow Jesus, are today? While we've never known Jesus as a physical presence, we are called to "ride" in the wake of his time on earth, dropped and outdistanced, but still pedaling; left behind to be the witnesses of his reality, the bearers of his Spirit and the practitioners of his teachings.

Learn

So maybe we can learn something positive in being dropped, and even from lagging behind other Christians.

Kelly Krause looks at the other riders who are still ahead of her and works her hardest to catch them. Even when she doesn't, she gets a little closer than the last time. While there are no perfect Christians, there certainly are followers of Jesus whose example of discipleship we can emulate, and from which we can learn.

Support

Haley Weaver also reminds us of the importance of being supportive and encouraging to others who are dropped and are struggling to keep up. Indeed, one of the cool things of being part of a church is that there are others to encourage us. And it should be part of our ministry to others to speak the word of encouragement.

In this text, Jesus tells his followers that he is leaving a “Heavenly Encourager” behind with them. Granted, Jesus doesn't use that term. Some translations are “Comforter.” Encouragement is part of the Spirit's work. The Spirit will do the work of encouragement by *“TEACHING YOU EVERYTHING, AND REMINDING YOU OF ALL THAT I HAVE SAID TO YOU.”*

Very few metaphors are perfect, and, although this matter of getting dropped while cycling does give us entry into the text for today, it doesn't cover everything the text says. One thing it misses is that we who follow Jesus are not being left behind in every sense. Jesus tells the disciples, *“THOSE WHO LOVE ME WILL KEEP MY WORD, AND MY FATHER WILL LOVE THEM, AND WE”* -- that is, the Father and the Son -- *“WILL COME TO THEM AND MAKE OUR HOME WITH THEM”* (v. 23). At the beginning of Chapter 14, Jesus tells the disciples that he is leaving *“TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR THEM”* (v. 2), but here, he's saying something more. As commentator Richard Burridge notes, “Not only does Jesus prepare a place for us in God, but he also makes a place for God in us.”

Yes, Jesus has outdistanced us. He's returned to his Father. But he has, at the same time, made his home in us who struggle to keep up with him. And we can rest assured that we are never truly alone. The Holy Spirit is with us always and we can find comfort knowing that we are cared for. Amen.