

In the winter of 1988-89 I was living in a flat in central London with three roommates while I did research for my doctoral dissertation. One night – it was probably past midnight – I woke from sleep, having a sense that I had heard something odd. I opened my eyes slightly just in time to see my bedroom door slowly, silently open. Then just as slowly, a head appeared and peeked in. Only half awake, I remember thinking, “Hmm, I don’t know that person. What’s a strange man doing in our apartment?” Slowly the door closed again as the head disappeared. I was left there to think, “There’s someone in my apartment. What should I do? I guess I had better go check it out.” I hastily threw on clothes and tip-toed to the door, opened it, and looked out. There in the hallway right in front of me stood the strange man, with his back to me, listening through the main door leading out of the apartment. When he heard me open the door he spun around. “What are you doing? Get out!” I shouted pointing at the main door.

At that moment two things happened. There was a banging at the front door, “Police, open up!” And the stranger took off running through the apartment towards the kitchen. A hero would have chased him and tackled him from behind. But I didn’t. I stepped forward and opened the door. “Where is he?” the police officer demanded. I pointed towards the kitchen, “That way.” Three officers ran through the door towards the kitchen, but it was too late. What turned out to be a cat-burglar had escaped out the kitchen window from which he had entered and was off up the drain pipes and over the roofs. As my three roommates opened their bedroom doors as the police stayed and took my statement. I never heard they caught him.

Our Lenten book this year is called, The Adventure of Discipleship, by Daniel Keating. Keating’s point is that we humans are attracted to adventure in life – hence the popularity of fantasy works such as The Lord of the Ring and the Narnia stories. The most profitable movies are superhero adventures, from Star Wars to The Black Panther because

we are made for adventure, and our lives should be understood as being part of a great adventure story.

We see Jesus today in the middle of the Greatest Adventure. After being baptized in the Jordan by John and beginning His public ministry, the next thing Jesus does is head off to the desert for a duel with the Devil. At the beginning of Lent we should pick up that clue. This season of Lent, and our whole Discipleship journey really, are simply following in Jesus' footsteps into that desert battle and adventure.

But there are two kinds of adventures in our lives, those we arrange -- and then the real ones. Arranged adventures are the river rafting trip, or Pacific Crest Trail hike, that we plan -- challenging, fresh experiences. But the real adventures are when the raft overturns in the rapids and you're caught underneath, or when you break your leg on the trail, with nobody around for miles.

I thought of my brief encounter with the cat-burglar this week because it was one of the brief, but real, adventures in my life. My

whole stay in London was an arranged adventure. But on that one night in London face to face with the thief, I was thrown into a situation I never expected and wasn't sure what to do or how it would end. I think most of us have had at least a few such real adventures.

Three qualities define such real adventures: first, they're the adventures we don't arrange, but just land in. A real adventure sweeps us away with it. We go places and do things we never thought of doing. Think of Abraham, Moses, the shepherd/king David, Luke Skywalker, Bilbo Baggins. We want our lives to be arranged adventures where we call the shots. But God knows that we need real adventures where we must walk by faith.

The second characteristic of real adventures is that they are about big things: life, death, love. The stakes are high.

And the third quality of a real adventure is that they will involve danger, suffering, doubt, courage. Things won't go perfectly. We'll have to make tough decisions and there will be a cost.

The main point in all this is that our entire lives are such real adventures. We want our lives to be arranged adventures, but God knows the most important lessons in life are the unplanned ones. We are thrown into our lives without our consent. Our lives' stories are about eternity – for our souls and for those we are in contact with. Never fall for the lie that your life doesn't matter. Our decisions have eternal consequences – and not just for us. Our lives are about big stuff. And our lives are filled with crosses – think of the sudden cancer diagnosis or the car accident. Like Jesus' own journey, begun in the desert, in today's Gospel, our journeys will pass through the cross.

We must face our lives as the real adventures they are. A big difference between the secular viewpoint and the Christian way of looking at life and the universe is that for secularists there is no universal, objective meaning in events. Any meaning is in their own minds. But Christians sees their lives as a small, but important, part of the greatest adventure tale ever told – the one written by God. We

Disciples of Jesus are part of an age-long story and we all have our parts to play in it. The story and world we read about in the Bible still continues all around us today. We're all living in the Bible's story!

And the kicker is that the very Author of the one true story has stepped into it and become the central character as Jesus of Nazareth, the God-Man and Savior. Faith means that we interpret our life in terms of this adventure story. Our faith isn't merely a set of laws teaching us right behavior. It reveals to us who and why we are.

Does your life seem filled with the unexplained and unexpected – with suffering as well as joy? That's because we're in the desert with Jesus on a real adventure. We'll be tested in this life just as He was in the desert. We will face our Cross just as He did. Faith tells us how the great story ends, with Jesus' final victory over sin, death, and the Devil. But what about our own individual part of the story? What will happen to our own character? That is the Lenten question we each face. How are we each doing in living out our part of the great adventure?