

St. Mark's Episcopal Church
February 10, 2019
The Reverend Rick Veit

If you get nothing else out of this sermon today, remember two things: 1) that You Matter in this world. You matter to God. You matter to me, to us as a faith community. If you are feeling rejected or judged, if you are sick or down and out, or maybe feeling lonely, afraid, sad or lost, remember that You Matter. And 2) We have to share this message with others. We have to “catch people”, if you will. You matter and we have to share this message with others.

And now a review of where we have been these past few weeks: When Jesus' ministry as an adult was about to begin, his first priority was to be baptized and filled with this Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. And after his baptism he experienced great difficulty. Life did not get any easier. Jesus was led by the devil, of all people, into the desert for 40 days and nights, tempted by sin and evil ways. Following this challenging time in his life, he went on to the city of Nazareth in central Israel and began to preach in the synagogues. And people loved him. They came in droves and cheered him on. He was at the top of his game...that is, until he crashed and burned, at least with the community of Nazareth. He began to preach some ideas that people did not like, messages that seemed to counter what they knew to be absolute truth.

For instance, Jesus was teaching about how both Jews and non-Jews, or Gentiles, could receive blessings and healing from God. This infuriated God's chosen people. *They* were the chosen. No one else. None of this Gentile stuff. Gentiles were separate. They didn't believe the same way that the Jews believed. And Jesus was treating them like almost equals – NON-Jews! Come on God! They, all of the sudden, wanted nothing of this man who claimed to be the Messiah. They drove Jesus out of town and tried to kill him. He slipped through the crowd and escaped.

The Jews *and* the Gentiles mattered to Jesus. But, soon after his popularity faded, many Jews wanted nothing to do with him. Jesus did not matter to them anymore, and they wanted to kill him. He was messing with their basic, their primary belief system.

All people will always matter to God, no matter what they do or how they live. This is also known as unconditional love. Now go share this with others.

Just a side note: I had this image while going through Seminary that I still believe today. It is a tight fist in one hand, and an open palm in the other. The tight fist represents everything that we know to be true, and we hold on tight to those principles. The open palm represents a new message from God, a new concept or a different angle.

To the Jews, they held on to their faith and their beliefs. Unfortunately, though, God had something else to teach them. An off-shoot of Judaism, what would eventually be called Christianity, would become as much a part of the faith as Judaism. There would be Jewish people *and* Gentiles who believed that Jesus was the Messiah. And, there would be Jewish people and Gentiles who did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. And so started a great schism. But both groups would be considered part of the faith by Jesus, of equal value, when

needing God. Both Jews and Gentiles, all people could be in relationship with God. And many Jews would not accept this new message, this open palm, new concept from God.

Incidentally, what are examples of the open and tight fists for us as Americans? **Slavery.** We used to believe that slavery was right, that black people from Africa were our property. And we used the Bible to back up those beliefs. And black and white people couldn't worship together, marry, or go to school together. Black and white people were not allowed to drink from the same water fountain. And then God taught us something different. That maybe those scriptures that were used did not refer to slavery as we knew it. **With regards to Women:** They are now allowed to work outside or inside the home, and are even allowed to become priests and bishops and archbishops. This is the open palm for some churches, not all. Women can even vote now. **With regards to people who are gay or transgendered:** You matter to God and you matter and are valued by us as Episcopalians. This open palm movement proclaims that we are to respect the dignity of every human being regardless of gender or race or color or nationality or sexual identity.

But I digress.

Next, Jesus went to the town of Capernaum, at the northern edge of the Sea of Galilee, or Lake Gennesaret. And he began to teach in the synagogues again after the turmoil in Nazareth. Not surprisingly, people loved him there as well. He mattered to them. Jesus was an amazing teacher. He began to heal more and more people. He even ordered a demon out of one man. And he continued going throughout the countryside teaching and healing people in need. This leads us to the story that we heard today.

With such, what I would call, rock star status, crowds were continuing to press in on Jesus everywhere he went. They could not get enough of this word of God, this healing presence that was in him.

Jesus boarded a boat at Capernaum. It was owned by a man named Simon, who was also called Peter. They went out a little ways from the shore and Jesus began to teach the people. When he was finished speaking, he asked Simon to put out into the deeper waters in order to catch some fish. This must have been a bit of a laughable moment. Simon let Jesus know that they had been out all night fishing and did not catch one thing. The fish were clearly not biting. But, fishing was a major industry in 1st century Palestine, and so they went out again anyway.

Tight fist: "Jesus, there is no fish to be caught in the lake! Let's not waist our time."

Open palm: "Go again. Perhaps a miracle will occur."

And lo and behold, they went out and began to catch so many fish that their nets began to break. So, other partnering fisherman, that perhaps had been laughing earlier at them, came out as well to reap the benefits of all the fish. The boats were so full of fish that they began to sink.

Simon was embarrassed at his lack of faith. His partners, James and John, sons of Zebedee, probably were feeling similar. Simon fell down at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

TIGHT FIST: Simon did not think that he was worthy anymore because he had fouled up.
OPEN PALM: Jesus, God's Son, had another message in store for him. "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." They brought their boats to shore and they left everything, and they followed him. Their open palm attitude, their openness to a new direction from God, inspired them to go in a new direction in life. Simon and James and John mattered to Jesus, to God. And Jesus was now going to use them to spread this same message of love to others, to "catch people", if you will. And they followed. This new way would now become their tight fist, as they began to hold on to a new concept and a new direction in life that they believed to be true. They were faithful, and they followed. (Show how the open palm became the tight fist).

Poet, Mary Oliver, once wrote, "Keep some room in your heart for the unimaginable." Another poet, Shel Silverstein, wrote, "Listen to the mustn'ts, child, listen to the don'ts, listen to the shouldn'ts, the impossibles, the wont's. Listen to the never haves, then listen close to me. Anything can happen, child, anything can be." "Keep some room in your heart for the unimaginable," and "Anything can happen, child, anything can be."

You matter to God and to us. Now go share this message of love with others. Go catch people, for Christ's sake. Go catch people for Christ's sake.

"You Matter" Cards

If I could have the ushers at this time pass out the little cards to everyone. Have everyone take two, one to keep for themselves and one to give away to a friend, a family member, or maybe even to an enemy or someone that you do not like. Please do not throw them away. Keep one for yourself and give one away. The card simply says: You Matter. This is from the Compassionate Cheyenne Movement.