

St. Mark's Episcopal Church
February 17, 2019
The Reverend Rick Veit

“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. (Senator Lynne Hutchins – Gay, bi, transgendered people)

We continue our walk with Jesus as we have been doing these past weeks in the scriptures. Jesus was baptized, in the wilderness of life for 40 days. He became popular because of his dynamic presence, especially when teaching people, and because he began to heal people. However, some did not like his messages and tried to kill him. Jesus escaped, but continued to teach and heal people in different parts of the countryside in Israel. People continued to follow Jesus. Some became his disciples, giving up everything, including their jobs and often leaving their families, in order to follow him and begin living the life that Jesus called them to lead, a life that we learned about in the scriptures today.

He continued his healings and teachings, inspiring some people and infuriating others. In fact, he even seemed to be breaking some of the Commandments. Jewish authorities were beginning to get concerned about this Messiah-like character who was drawing many of the faithful away, away in their opinion.

One day Jesus was teaching in the synagogue and a man approached him who had a shriveled up hand. Jesus had the man stand up in front of everyone. He asked the crowds of people, “I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it, (to preserve life by healing or to destroy life by refusing to heal?).” Jesus then asked the man to stretch out his shriveled hand, and the man’s hand stretches. It became completely restored.

This may sound ludicrous to us today. But back then, doing anything on the Sabbath other than rest and worshiping God was considered a sin. You keep the Sabbath holy. And this included even healing someone. They had to wait until sundown on Saturday night to do any work. Sundown was considered the beginning of the next day for Jewish people.

We believe in keeping the Sabbath holy as well today. But what does that really mean? We start filling in the details in order to understand how to live that Commandment. Do you go to church? Yes. Do you rest and maybe spend time with your families? Yes. Do you prepare for the next day of work? Uh...no. That would be work, right? And what about if you were a physician? Shouldn’t you work when someone is in need regardless of the Sabbath? Take it another day, or not, and the one suffering will just have to suffer for another day. Jewish authorities began to define these details. People were not allowed to heal. Did you know that if you were writing a letter to someone, if you wrote literally three letters (a, b, c, or the Hebrew:

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Jesus escaped again, but continued teaching and healing people, inspiring many and infuriating many, not too dissimilar to today. This is where we pick up our story today.

Jesus was with his closest disciples. They were called apostles. Crowds of people from all over Israel were continuing to follow and listen to him, and they desired healing from their diseases, any ailments. Even unclean spirits were coming out of people. They were just trying to touch him. Healing power seemed to be flowing out of him to any who touched him.

Then, Jesus began to teach the people what standards, what life they should strive for as disciples. He spells out the blessings and the woes. We begin with the blessings, or beatitudes.

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” The first beatitude sets the tone for all that follows. It is not meant to idealize or glorify poverty. It, instead, declares God’s prejudicial commitment to the poor. The coming of the kingdom will bring a reversal of fortunes. This first beatitude is tied to Jesus’ fulfillment of Isaiah 61, preaching good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, bind up those that suffer.

The next beatitudes continue this message of reversals. The hungry, they will be filled. If you are weeping, you will learn laughter again. When you are abused, hated, excluded, or reviled, you will find joy. With Jesus, whatever you are going through in this world, there is always hope. There is always help. Although it may seem dark all around, all-consuming at times, there is light with our Lord. God actually favors the poor and hungry, those weeping, those who are hated. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus’ teachings are scandalous. They overturn every conventional expectation. The scandal of his ministry was his association with outcasts, and it was on them that he pronounced God’s blessings.

That is why I spend so much time pointing out those who have been marginalized, women, people who are gay or transgendered, people of different colors than white, slaves. You are a blessing in God’s eyes! God’s favor is with you.

And woe to everyone else! Those who are rich, you think you have what you need.

A side note: Time after time, I read about or hear stories of people who win the lottery, and the miserable lives that follow for them. Every family member, every friend, ends up being mad at them because they are not getting enough. That said, I still would like to win the lottery. I will be different! Trust me. I am a priest.

Money is so enticing, and so tempting. We want to hoard it all to ourselves. We become so preoccupied with our possessions that we fail to respond to God's invitation. The rich who neglect the poor at their gate will find that in the hereafter they will have none of the abundance they enjoyed in their life.

How much do you give away? How much do you spend on yourselves? How full is our Little Free Pantry outside? It has been empty of late.

““But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.
"Woe to you who are full now, laughing now. Woe to you when all speak well of you.””

Jesus better be careful or he is going to get himself killed trying to help people. Well, we know the rest of the story, don't we.

Do not take life for granted. Give to the poor. As you leave church today, keep your eyes open to anyone that God puts before you. Then serve them. Stop in your life and help them. Jesus talked about helping the poor more than anything else.

How much do you give to the poor? I will be honest, the Veits do not give enough. How many sets of clothes do you have? How many cars? How many dolls are at the Veit household? So many! What percentage of your income did you give away last year...now that the tax structure has changed?

I will say, that we have been blessed at St. Mark's. People's giving has continued to go up over the past years. Their time and talent giving has increased as well. How about the charities around town though?

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