

JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Trusting the God You Believe In

Sunday, August 11, 2019

Rev. Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

Matthew 5:38–42, Matthew 7:12

Today, I want to share with you one of the most important spiritual lessons I've ever learned. In fact, the impact of this spiritual truth is so enormous for me that it's probably one of the most important lessons in the last 10 or 15 years of my life, and I feel compelled to share it with you. My hope and prayer is that it makes a difference to your life as well.

I'll be honest with you; there have been times in my life when I have been frustrated with God. There have been times in my life when I prayed and prayed and prayed for something and not only did I not get what I prayed for, but it seemed I had received the exact opposite. Ever been there? There have been times in my life when I've been confused about God's will. There have been times in my life when, honestly, as I've walked with God in this life that I have been frustrated because of difficult circumstances. But there came a day when I learned a powerful lesson that turned a lot of things around for me and strengthened my faith in God. This lesson also gave me supreme confidence to live out my faith in this world.

Now, if you're surprised to hear this preacher confess all these things to you today, I'm glad, because one of the things you need to know is that we preachers up here, we're human. We have the same joys, the same concerns, the same frustrations as you do. In fact, I'm always amazed when people seem to think that we're, I don't know, above being human. Sometimes, people will say to me, "Charley, you're just so real." Amen to that. I'm really human. Just ask my wife. When we're cut, we all bleed. When we're tickled, we all laugh, and when we hurt, we all cry. That's why, whenever I preach to you, I always preach from my heart, and

as I search the Word of God for a message that's going to touch you, it must touch me first. The old definition of a sermon is that it is a preacher speaking loudly to himself or herself. I need this word just as much as you do, so, today, as always, I'm going to preach and speak from my heart a message that I think is going to make a big, big difference to you in your life. So, if you've ever struggled with your faith, if you've ever been confused about God's will, if you've ever been in a state of complete chaos and don't know which end is up, this message is for you.

Maybe you're fragile today or maybe you know someone who is. Maybe you've gone 12 rounds with the difficulties of life and you feel pummeled. Maybe your head is spinning and your soul is spinning and your spirit is spinning so much, you don't know which end is up. Just give me a few minutes, and I'm going to preach a word for you today that I think is going to bring healing and power and direction in your life.

I want to talk about a man in the Bible who had the same struggles that I've already mentioned. His name is Moses. Now, can you believe this? Moses was 80 years old when God called him to go to Pharaoh and say, "Let my people go." At first, Moses fought God. "God, I'm a murderer. God, I'm a stutterer. God, I'm not a public speaker. God, they're not going to listen to me. God, it's going to be a disaster. God, I'm going to fail," and, finally, Moses said to God, "Send somebody else."

Ever been there? God kept calling and God kept calling and God kept calling and, finally, Moses relented. "Okay, I'll go. I'll go. I'll go," so Moses went. He confronted Pharaoh, and he said, "Pharaoh, God has sent me to tell you to let his

people go,” and Pharaoh said, “That's a good one, Moses. You ought to be a standup comedian.” “No, seriously, God called me to tell you to let his people go.” Pharaoh got irate, and he said, “You know what? I’m going to show you what I think of your god and your request. I’m going to put so much work on these slaves, on God’s people, so much work on their backs, they will not meet their quota of building bricks, and then I’m going to punish them and make them miserable.”

Moses wasn’t too popular with the people of God. Can you imagine? In fact, this is what the people of God said to Moses, “Moses, may the Lord look on you and judge you. You have made us obnoxious to Pharaoh, and his officials have put a sword in their hands to kill you.” Now can you imagine how Moses felt? Probably like how most of us would feel: “God did you set me up to fail? I told you this wouldn't work. I told you I would fail. I told you this would be a disaster. I told you.”

In fact, this is what Moses said to the Lord. “Why, Lord? Why have you brought trouble on these people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on your people, and you have not rescued your people at all.” Basically, Moses was saying, “God, you’ve been nothing but trouble to me. Is this why you sent me, to take me away from my family, to take me away from my sheep, to take me away from my home and humiliate me?”

Ever been there? Maybe you’re right there in your life right now. Maybe you’ve gone in a particular direction that you thought was right, you thought was God’s way, you thought was true, and it blew up in your face. Maybe you followed the advice of a well-meaning Christian who said, “When God closes a door, he always opens a window,” and so you jumped out that window and you fell flat on your face. You are discouraged and you are frustrated and you are tired and you are exhausted and you are confused, and maybe you feel like quitting on your life or quitting on your faith or quitting on God.

Before you do, I want you to listen to what God said to Moses in this moment. Exodus 6: “‘Now, you will see what I will do to Pharaoh,’ says the Lord. ‘Because of my mighty hand, he will let them go. Because of my mighty hand, he will drive them out of his country. Then, you will know that I am the Lord your God who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.’”

Why was Moses going through this? Oh, people hear this—to bring glory to God. God wanted Pharaoh to resist. Why? Because God wanted to display his power to Moses and the people of God. God wanted to show the people of God that his power was true, that his power was real and they could trust in that power.

Think about it: If Moses had succeeded at the beginning, he would have received all the credit, and God’s power would not be revealed. But we know the story. God’s power was revealed. His majesty was manifested through the plagues and through the people of God crossing the Red Sea. So what is the great lesson that has transformed me out of this story? What is the great lesson that has turned my life around? What is the great lesson I want you to hear?

The most important decision you can ever make in your life is to trust God’s perspective instead of your own. Let me say that again: The most important decision you can ever make in your life is to trust God’s perspective instead of your own. You write that down. You singe it on your heart.

Now there’s a great study that we’re going to do in this church in the months and years to come. Ever heard of *Experiencing God* by Henry Blackaby? In that study, Blackaby says this, and listen closely, “The quickest way to spiritual problems in your life is to judge God, judge your life, judge your faith in the middle of your circumstances.” It’s true, and how often do we do that? We stand in the middle of our pain, “Oh, this is my lot in life. This is how it’s always going to be. Why am I here, Lord? Why did you screw up? You didn’t keep your promises.”

Never ever judge your life. Never ever judge God. Never ever judge your faith in the middle of your pain because you will always get a distorted view. Never assume your perspective is the right one. Instead, trust God's perspective in the midst of your pain—knowing your pain is not the end of your journey. Trust God with the rest of your journey wherever you are in your life right now.

Now, I learned this powerful lesson through a great film. I'm a very cultured individual. I like great film, not movies, film. "The Karate Kid," the cheesy one from the '80s, you know, Ralph Macchio? You know that one? Great movie. Many of you have seen it. How many of you have seen "The Karate Kid"? Yeah. As you know, it's a story about Daniel who moves into this town and he starts getting bullied by a group of guys who know karate really well. He comes across a man, a karate master, by the name of who? Mr. Miyagi, who's an expert in it, and Miyagi befriends Daniel.

In one of my favorite scenes of the movie, Daniel is ready to be trained in karate. He's ready to be trained to defend himself, and Mr. Miyagi says, "Come over to my house and I'll teach you something." So Daniel shows up, gets there early in the morning, and what does he find next to a dirty car? A bucket, soap, a sponge and wax, and Mr. Miyagi says, "Daniel, this is what I want you to do. Clean this car, and this is how I want you to do it. Do it with me if you like. Wax on, wax off. Wax on, wax off." So Daniel does it. "Okay, I'll clean your car. Wax on, wax off," and he finishes, and the car is beautiful, and he says, "Mr. Miyagi, look at this," and Mr. Miyagi says, "That's great. Now, all of them, Daniel-san." And there are six or seven other cars and he does them all.

It's the end of the day, he's tired, and Mr. Miyagi says, "Daniel, come back the next day, and I'm going to teach you something else." He comes back the next day and what does Daniel find? Cans of paint, a paintbrush, and a note from Mr. Miyagi that reads, "Paint this fence, and do it like this, up and down vertically." Do it with me. Nice technique. So he paints this part of the fence, and he says, "Mr.

Miyagi, look at this." "Very good, Daniel-san. Now, all of the fence." "What?" So, begrudgingly, Daniel does the entire fence.

It's the end of another day and Daniel is exhausted. His shoulder hurts. Mr. Miyagi says, "Now, come back tomorrow. I'll teach you something else." "No. No. No. No. No. I have been your slave. You have taught me nothing. I'm leaving," and he leaves. "Daniel-san, come back. Show me wax on, wax off. Show me paint the fence." Then Mr. Miyagi proceeds to punch and kick Daniel but Daniel blocks him with his newfound moves: Wax on, wax off, and paint the fence. Little did Daniel know what he was learning. From his perspective, he was doing hard labor, but from Mr. Miyagi's perspective, he was teaching Daniel to defend himself.

What does Isaiah say? "The Lord says, 'My ways are higher than your ways. My thoughts are greater than your thoughts.'" One of the phrases we hear in church culture a lot is "God works in mysterious ways." To God, it isn't so mysterious. It's only mysterious to us from our perspective, and I tell you, folks, I have learned this lesson so often in my life and every time I learn it, I gain strength. Every time I learn it, I gain more faith. Every time I learn to trust God's perspective rather than my own, I find wisdom beyond myself. I want you to hear that today because I imagine some of you in worship today are in the pit. You are in the midst of a valley. You are in the midst of great pain, and you think, "This is my lot in life forever." I'm here to tell you it's not.

Now, a while back, I was inspired to write a book. Have you ever been inspired to write a book? I had written some things for small publications, but I thought, "Yes, I am ready to write this perfect book for Abingdon Press. It's based on a sermon series. It was a Bible study. It's going to be perfect. The editor is going to see it. He's going to open it up, and the angels are going to sing," so I submitted it. That didn't happen. Abingdon usually doesn't take unsolicited manuscripts, but I sent it, and I waited

and I waited and I waited and waited. Finally, I got a rejection letter, and it read something like this, “Your work really wasn’t up to par to what we usually accept.”

I was dejected, and I confided in a friend. He said, “Charley, you ought to send them some of those lecture preaching notes that you’ve done when you taught preaching.” I said, “Those are terrible. They’re not going to like those.” He said, “Just do it,” so I got on the internet, on the Abingdon website. I didn’t know a soul at Abingdon, except that one editor, and he wasn’t in charge of preaching, so I submitted to some random editor. These were just notes.

The same day I submitted it, an editor got back to me and said, “I’ve pushed it to a senior editor. I think she might like it.” A couple of hours later, I hear back from the senior editor, and she says, “I like this stuff. Send me more.” I didn’t have more! “Okay. Of course, absolutely!” So I’m writing, writing, writing, writing furiously—oh, my gosh—and I send her whatever else I had been able to get down on paper.

About a week later, the senior editor sent me an email that read, “We’re accepting it. You’re going to write this book for us.” I couldn’t believe it! Now, don’t worry, I couldn’t take you to Taco Bell

on the royalties I get from these books. But I fulfilled my dream of writing a book. In fact, not only have I written one, I’ve written two books for Abingdon. But, listen, if I had quit after being rejected, I would not have written the book God wanted me to write. God wanted me to write a book, but not the one I had in mind.

Our perspective is so small. Our perspective is so obtuse. We think it’s the end. We think this is the only way. Oh, no, stretch yourself. Trust that God has bigger plans than you can imagine.

The most important decision you can ever make is to trust God’s perspective rather than your own. I don’t know where you are in your life today. Maybe you’re in the midst of confusion. Maybe you’re in the midst of a difficult relationship. Maybe you have a shattered dream that you worked for for so long and you feel like giving up. Don’t do it.

An eager disciple once approached Abba Anthony, the Great Desert Father, and asked him, “Father Abba, what must one do to please God?” Abba said, “Just three things. Always be aware of God’s presence, and always obey God’s word, and the third for you, my son, is the most important right now. Wherever you find yourself, do not easily leave.” The most important decision you can ever make is to trust God’s perspective instead of your own.



11180 Medlock Bridge Road Johns Creek, GA 30097
770-497-8215 www.johncreekumc.org