

# JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## I Dare You!

Sunday, July 7, 2019

Rev. Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

Matthew 5:13-16

Ever heard the phrase, “Something got lost in translation?” There are programs on the internet that will translate words into any language you desire. Of course, you do not always know how accurate the translations are. Someone decided to test the accuracy of one particular program with the familiar song, “Take Me Out to the Ballgame.” The old favorite song by Jack Norworth goes like this:

*Take me out to the ballgame*

*Take me out to the crowd*

*Buy me some peanuts and Cracker Jack*

*I don't care if I ever get back*

*Let me root, root, root for the home team*

*If they don't win, it's a shame*

*For its one, two, three strikes, you're out*

*At the old ball game*

The song was run through a program that translated the song into German and then back into English. As you will see, something got lost in translation. The song went from a celebratory chant to something that looks like a harsh war cry:

*Execute me to the ball play*

*Execute me to the masses*

*Buy me certain peanuts and crackerstackfusig*

*I'm not interested if I never receive back*

*Let me root, root, root for the main team*

*If they don't win, it is dishonor*

*For there are one, two, three impacts on you*

*At the old ball play*

The essence of the song was lost (Lee Strobel, “Meet the Jesus I Know”). Something was lost in translation.

I believe something a lot more important than a song has been lost in translation in our modern culture and the contemporary church – the power and passion of the gospel. When I read the gospels and see how Christ changed people with his radical love, I get excited. When I read the book of Acts and reflect on how the early church changed the world through the power of the Holy Spirit, I get enthusiastic. However, when I compare my excitement and enthusiasm to how both the church and the general public perceive the gospel today, I sense a disconnect. It is clear that something has been lost in translation.

When Jesus walked the earth he healed the sick, raised the dead, and made the blind to see. He loved the unlovable and made the marginal important. The public response to Jesus was either to make him king or execute him. Today, when you mention the gospel in the west folks don't respond with animosity or enthusiasm. The typical response is a yawn! People are indifferent to the gospel.

Even in the mainline church the most popular expression about the gospel is not “My life has been changed” or “I have new purpose and meaning.” More than likely, you are to hear the response, “That was a nice service today.” Something has been lost in translation

Why this loss in translation? Why this disconnect? Has the power of God diminished? No, I don't believe that. The power of God is alive and well. Are we beyond the age of miracles? No, I don't believe that either. Miracles still happen all around us. Has God's love waned? No, God still loves us more than we can ever imagine. Then why? The answer is simple. Generally speaking, Christians do not dare to live out the adventure and excitement of the gospel.

People often ask me, “Why aren’t more people coming to church? Why aren’t more young people involved in the faith? Why isn’t the church making more of an impact?” I often respond, “Well, has Christ made a difference to you and have you made a difference for Christ? Do you exude the life, joy, peace, love and enthusiasm of the gospel? If not, why would anyone choose to waste their time with church? They can find more excitement at a ball game or going fishing.” You see, if we are no different than the blandness of the world, why would anyone bother with Christianity? There are a lot more appealing choices.

I had the responsibility of going to a Rays game a few years ago. They were playing the Red Sox. When someone asked me to go and said the seats were behind the Rays dug out, I felt it was my duty to accept the invitation. After all, the presence of clergy is always important when the Rays play Boston.

As you can imagine, there were many enthusiastic fans sitting around us. I was one of them. Some were for Boston and some were for the Rays. They were screaming and cheering and sharing all kinds of opinions. I didn’t realize there were so many experts in the game of baseball! I recall when Ben Zobrist got up to the plate for the Rays. As some of you know, Zobrist is a Christian and is vocal about his faith. An enthusiastic fan seated behind me commented to his buddy, “I like Zobrist, but he is too exuberant about his faith.” I chuckled because the man who made the comment was ringing a cow bell and holding up a sign for the Rays. He also mentioned earlier that he was a church-goer. I guess being exuberant about baseball is okay, but being excited about God is unacceptable.

It’s funny. People will lose their minds while screaming and ringing a cow bell for a game played with a ball and a bat, but when it comes to the Creator of the universe exuberance is frowned upon. The world is peculiar. Don’t get me wrong. I can be obnoxious as a sports fan. I love cheering on the Rays. I’ve just always wondered what it would be like if someone showed up to church with a cow bell and a sign that read, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow!”

Where is our enthusiasm and joy for the love of Jesus? Where is our exuberance? Where is our sense of adventure that the early church had? Where is our joy for the love of Jesus? Where is our light?

This is why I have entitled this sermon, “I Dare You!” I want to dare this church to live out gospel and be all that God has created us to be! I want to dare each individual here to be more than a half-baked Christian. I dare you to start a crusade in your life and be your best

for God. I dare you to be more than a church-goer; I dare you to be a life changer! I dare you to be salt and light; not salty and lit!

I’m convinced that the gospel is the real deal. The love of Jesus is the answer to all of our problems and the fulfillment of all of our desires. If you have not experienced the love of Jesus yourself and have not been a vessel of that love it is simply because you have not dared to do it! But once you dare – once you decide to rise above crowd and yield to the power, love and adventure of God, real life begins – real adventure begins.

Jesus walks on the shore of your soul today and says, “You want adventure? I dare you to follow me. You want joy? I dare you to follow me. You want life? I dare you to follow me. You want meaning? I dare you to follow me. You want purpose? I dare you to follow me. You want love? I dare you to follow me.

I remember a man coming to see me in another church I served. He look ragged and worn out. He was known as a success in the community. Yet, this is what he said to me, “I’m tired of existing. I want to start living.”

Perhaps this is where you are today. Maybe you are finding that what the world defines as success or happiness is not as great as it seems. Maybe you lie awake at night looking for something more, something deeper, something lasting. Maybe what you define as life is not cutting it anymore. Maybe you are ready to make the move from success to significance.

It is this decision that separates admirers of Jesus from followers of Jesus. It is also what separates vibrant churches from dying churches. What God needs are Christians and churches who dare to be all they can be for God. What God needs are people who stop looking at their agenda and pray, God, I want to be part of your agenda. Use me to the fullest!”

Let me tell you something I have learned about God. God’s number one priority is not to make us comfortable. God’s priority is to make us significant for Him – the make us the “light of the world” and the “salt of the earth.” Therefore, the closer we get to God the more He moves us out of our comfort zones and calls us to take a risk, make a sacrifice, and move to the heartbeat of the gospel. The closer we get to God, the more He calls us to let go of our fear and live dangerously in His hands. This is where real life and significance is found. Jesus tells us the more we lose ourselves for the gospel the more we find ourselves. When we risk our lives for the gospel, we come face to

face with our destiny and the life we were created for.  
We must give to live!

In the Holy Land, there is the Sea of Galilee. Its water comes from a fresh brook. It is fruitful in fish and other sea life. The Sea of Galilee feeds into the Jordan River. The Jordan River gives life to desert places. But the Jordan River also feeds into a particular sea to the south – the Dead Sea. If you swim in the Dead Sea, you can't help but float because it is so salty. The reason it is called the Dead Sea is because it does not have an outlet. It takes water but does not give it away! This produces the saline problem which makes it salty and dead. Nothing lives in the Dead Sea.

If you want to live, you've got to give the love of Jesus away. If you want to live, you must give God's gifts away. Dare to share all God has given you, and you will find a rich and fuller life. You must give to live.

Instead of spending your time praying for comfort and ease, I dare you to pray, "God, reveal to me your call for my life. Lord, give me a risky adventure where I can make a difference for you. Give me a challenge. I want to be a significant for you." Watch God move like a tidal wave in your life!

It doesn't take much to be salt and light and make a difference.

I recall a lady coming to see me about an all too common problem. She told me that she did not enjoy going to work. She said she would quit but there weren't many jobs and she needed the money. I asked her why she did not like going to work and she replied, "Well, everyone has a bad attitude. My co-workers talk behind each other's backs. No one ever has any fun. It is miserable. I dread going to work every day." I asked, "Have you ever thought of killing the bad atmosphere with kindness?" She replied, "What do you mean?" I said, "Do you ever smile at your co-workers? Do you ever offer to help them with their work when your load is lighter? Do you ever offer to get them lunch?" She said, "Well, no. It never really occurred to me to do that." I said, "Try it for a month and see what happens."

She did try to do those things for a month. And guess what happened? She came back and told me that "it had worked." She said the atmosphere in the office had completely changed. She mentioned that even the boss had said in a staff meeting that he had noticed a change in the office and he liked it! Just one simple act of kindness can do so much! It begins with you and me.

It's amazing what we can produce with very little. After all, Jesus only needed five loaves and two fishes to feed a multitude. When the disciples were willing to use the little they had God made a miracle happen. Jesus said we could move mountains with just a tiny mustard seed of faith. You don't need more money, power, confidence, or resources to be faithful and dependable. Just use what you have. Be faithful with the little things and you will be blessed with greater things. The little things contain more power than you know!

You have in your possession two little things that, when used faithfully, can make such a difference. If people would just be dependable with these two things, the world would be a different place. These two things are on either side of your head. They are your ears! The most dependable people I know are those that really listen. Someone once said that listening is the highest form of love. I believe that. When people listen with their hearts and not just with their heads, love happens.

I came across a touching story the other day. Three people were having lunch in a diner. They were a grandmother, a mother, and a little girl. The waitress first took the grandmother's order and then the mother's. Finally, she said to the little girl, "Honey, what would you like?" The mother of the little girl interrupted and said, "No, I'm going to order for my daughter." Yet the waitress continued to concentrate on the little girl and repeated, "Honey, what is it that you really want?" The little girl said, "I would like a hamburger." And the waitress said, "Do you want mustard and relish and ketchup and the works?" The little girl clapped her hands in excitement and replied, "Yes, I want the works!"

The waitress turned to the kitchen and called out the orders for the grandmother and mother. Then she paused and said in a loud voice, "And give me a deluxe hamburger with the works!" The little girl said, "Mommy...Mommy, she thinks I'm real!"

When we can be counted on to do something as simple as pay attention to somebody, to listen to them with our hearts, we make a difference.

You may be wondering how you go about finding what God wants you to do. Maybe you are like the parishioner who told his preacher after the sermon one day, "Preacher, I have all the inspiration I need. Please give me a handle!"

Here is your handle – The three “P’s”: Pray, Passion, People. Spend some time in prayer with God. Ask God to reveal to you his call on your life.

Also, pay attention to your passions. What excites you? What are you convicted about? Many times our passions reveal our call. I love what Frederick Buechner said, “A call is when our greatest passion intersects with the world’s greatest need.”

Finally, what are the important people in your life telling you about yourself and the gifts you have. What is the church telling you about where you need to be serving?

One of my favorite stories is about Abraham Lincoln. During his White House years he would often slip into the Wednesday night service at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church where Dr. Gurley was the pastor. In order not to disrupt things, Lincoln would listen from the privacy of the pastor’s study, which was

right next to the sanctuary. Lincoln’s young assistant usually came along with him and on one night his assistant asked Lincoln how he liked the sermon. Lincoln replied, “I thought it was well thought-out, powerfully delivered, and very eloquent.” The assistant asked, “Then you thought it was a great sermon?” Lincoln replied, “No. It failed. It failed because he did not ask us to do something great” (Bruce Larson, “What God Wants to Know”).

My preaching philosophy has always been that I have failed if I do not dare you to do something great for God. Today, here is my dare: Give yourself completely to God’s will and love and go wherever He leads you. Real life won’t begin until you do. Your life is waiting. I dare you!