

Hello this is Pastor Matt Woods, pastor at Grace Lutheran Church in New Albany, Indiana and this is a weekly devotion for June 15, 2020

Hello again. Today I want to talk about valuing human beings. I touched on this point yesterday in the message. Yesterday I mentioned a video by Penn Jillette made back in 2009 or 10. https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=10&v=6md638smQd8&feature=emb_logo He is an avid atheist and firm unbeliever. He makes that clear. I still find what he said something to be respected and noted by all Christians. He talked about a fan who after the show met Penn looked Penn in the eye with a sincere love and took the time to give him a Gideon's Bible. He respected the gesture enough to take a minute to make a video about the moment. It makes enough of an impact that he believed the man to be a "good man." But he also says that if you believe in something you should be proselytizing it—sharing it. If you believe in something and believe that something has good in it, social awkwardness is no excuse to avoid sharing it.

He said in his video response, "If you believe that there is a heaven and hell and people may not get eternal life and it's not worth telling him this because you feel socially awkward or something, how much do you have to hate someone not to tell them about the Gospel. How much do you have to hate someone to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them?" Effectively, if I've got a cure for cancer and choose not to share it for any reason then what kind of Christian am I? And eternal life is much more important.

The point is valid and important. This is why I am emphasizing it today. The mere discussion of certain lives mattering while others do not is not the message of the Gospel and assumes that some are not as valuable as others. Valuing all human beings (for God so loved the world) is what Jesus does in His cross. He doesn't distinguish who He dies for. Jesus died for all people, including Penn Jillette even though not all people believe in Him.

But notice Matthew 27:54—"When the centurion and those with him guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified and said, "Truly this was the Son of God." Roman soldiers who had seen too many crucifixions saw something different in the way Jesus died. Lord willing people will see all kinds of people but they will detect something different about us in God's grace. At the very least Jesus' crucifixion left an impact on them. They saw the depth of Jesus' suffering, as well as his concern for others, and the grace that filled that terrible day. It left an impact on hardened soldiers who had no love for Jews, made it their business to crucify Jesus efficiently, making sure he died there. Jesus succeeded in dying for our sins even if everyone didn't receive what He was offering. And here's a noted result of the cross. Hardened soldiers at least respected Jesus' passion even if they didn't believe in Him as Savior of the world or understand Him. He gained respect by the way He died on the cross. Lord willing the same can be said of us; perhaps we may gain respect by how we live in Christ.

In the early days of Christianity plagues in Rome swept through and the church went to work. Christians did things that gained so much respect from the community that non-Christians started asking about Jesus and many came to believe. Christians loved Christians and non-Christians who had plague and gave freely what they had been given. They took their cue from Jesus who hung out with people labeled as one thing or another but was never embarrassed by anyone nor wrote them off because of the broken nature of their lives. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 makes it a point to encourage Christians to love each other in Christ ¹¹ and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, ¹² *so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders...*"

Consider also Matthew 18:1-6. “At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”² He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them.³ And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.⁴ Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.⁵ And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.⁶ “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Children are not always valued by adults. Yet Jesus points to them and says they get it better than adults.

Come on. The disciples are asking the wrong question of Jesus. It’s not a game where one disciple is more important than another, one person more than another. “Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Have you ever watched little children play with one another? Our preschoolers at Grace School are wonderful creatures. They don’t care what kind of home the other kids come from, or their color, or that they have something different about them than themselves. It’s amazing the level of acceptance that is on display in those kids. They can still have little attitudes once in a while—welcome to humanity. But those preschoolers think nothing at all of unconditionally hugging another kid and being their buddy.

So, let’s come back to where we started. How do we value other human beings? We offer them dignity by communicating they are worthy of our time and our effort.

Assume nothing. Do not judge a book by its cover. I have had some of the most intense conversations about faith with people who struggle with sexuality issues, with faith issues, with self-respect issues, with pride issues, and some who just have issues. I have been so grateful for those opportunities and some of them I am proud to call my friends today. I often don’t know if I have done any good but I have learned to work through my “social awkwardness” enough to discover some great people out there.

And here’s a secret. I’ve been a pastor long enough to discover that we are more same than different. Many of us struggle with some kind of issues at some level in our lives. I’ve also learned that the obvious things bring the most respect out of people; hard work, showing up and helping out if needed, being respectful and honest, and patient gentleness. These things often give me a chance to talk with others. Of course, if I can show what Christ looks like and build respect doing so—all the better. Such things become powerful when someone knows you are doing such things for them. Again, you communicate their value when you do.

Bottom line take a risk. You are, after all, the one who carries the faith in Jesus and has something worth sharing. Show someone they are valued and loved in Jesus. Step up; give a conversation a chance even when it is socially awkward for you. You might discover someone really interesting. You might also at least leave an impression about Christians that is respected and memorable. As we mentioned above that has value too even if one hasn’t (yet) come to faith in Jesus. Who knows, maybe what you do will lead to faith in Jesus...eventually. Give it a shot this week. Show someone they matter.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with His favor and give you His peace.

Pastor Matt Woods

John 3:30