

OCTOBER 12, 2025

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

SERMON “Not My Need But Yours” John 4:4-28, John 8:2-11

This week we don't have a suggestion. I want to encourage you to continue to use the sheets on the welcome desk in the gathering area to offer what's on your hearts and minds that you'd like to hear about from the pulpit. This morning we're going to see what the origin of this request is.

It begins with the golden rule. Do to others as you'd have them do to you.

This is something that we often forget about. It's easy to respond to emotions and knee jerk reactions. It's easy to see the fault in someone else. It's much harder to take a moment and reflect inward to where we have our own issues. It's harder to ask how we'd like others to address us. Sometimes harder still is to set aside our own pride and ego and genuinely respond the way we would like to be responded to were we in the same situation. In terms of evangelism and communicating faith, a lot of Christianity has fallen into an unfortunate trap. While when we have a problem, a challenge, a confession, we want to work it through, but as we are ready. We need to be engaged where we are at. Instead often what we give or receive is our own interpretation of what is necessary.

You come to me with something and instead of listening and responding to what you are giving, I tell you what I think you should be doing, feeling, believing, etc. I hijack the conversation to my agenda. Which leaves you stuck. You're not getting to deal with what you want to deal with. What you're ready to deal with. What you feel you NEED to deal with.

So likely you don't get what you're looking for. At best you leave dissatisfied. At worst I've hurt you, driven you away, or made you feel disregarded or disrespected.

That's this series. What do YOU need to hear about? Because what I'm perceiving could be wrong.

This sense is wildly Biblical and Jesusy.

Our struggle is that Christianity has been around so long that many think they have it all figured out and licensed to hammer others into believing likewise. There is an admirable quality to the boldness modern Christianity seeks to inspire in the believer. It's good to be unashamed of our faith. It's good to have resolve in our faith.

On the other hand there's been a lot of teaching that what we need to do is corner people and in some cases create confrontation so that we can tell them what they “need to know”. It doesn't matter if they are ready. It doesn't matter what they feel they need to engage. It matters what we think they need and if they don't receive it of course that's not on us. It's on them.

I disagree.

Jesus is a great example. Let's look at the two passages we read this morning.

The Samaritan woman at the well is a wonderful example. Jews and Samaritans hated each other. Men didn't associate with women at such a public place as a communal well. Particularly one on one. Yet here Jesus was. The great Jewish Rabbi having simple conversation with this Samaritan woman.

He didn't give her what she expected. Why did she expect it? Because she'd already experienced it over and over again, She'd been shamed. She'd been devalued. She'd been outcast. That's why she was there alone! This is the same with many people today who don't come to faith or come to church. They already know how they've been treated by Christians. They've been humiliated. They've been harangued. They've been told how bad they are. They know all that conversation. They don't need more.

What did Jesus give her? What was she ready to talk about? What was she ready to engage? Something different.

Jesus saw her. He listened to her. He validated her worth. He heard her story and approached her on that level. Not only that, but she expected Him to be a taker. “What do you want from me?” Jesus instead answered with giving. “I've got a gift for you that will sustain you forever.”

This woman wasn't looking for a Messiah. She was looking to be disregarded and mistreated. Jesus met her where she was at. He didn't condone any of her misdeeds. He simply acknowledged her life and let her know He accepted her anyway. And He offered her life. Not through judgment or forcing her to listen to some list of expectations she failed to meet or social boundaries that gave Him permission to dismiss or degrade her. He offered her life simply because He loved her along with all of her people.

And what did she do? As He reveals His identity as Messiah to this most unlikely woman she runs off and begins spreading the word about Him. She spreads the gospel! The gospel of a man who knew her and loved her

anyway. And the town gathered and many came to know Him.

Amazing. Meeting her where she was at. Listening rather than telling. Revealing in a way that she could relate and comprehend rather than expecting her to grasp His own understanding and phrasing. It works.

Even the disciples were confused. We know because while they didn't say anything the gospel reveals that they were silent about their opinions about this meeting. Likely because of their own prejudices. What Jesus did, they wouldn't have. Where Jesus succeeded their own divisive upbringing, and need to obey social and religious rules would have caused them to fail.

The story of the woman caught in adultery is similar.

The ones accusing her and ready to stone her were functioning on one thing. Their own agenda. They didn't care about her. They wanted to shame and accuse Jesus. She was a pawn. Her life meant nothing to them. In other words they didn't see her as anything more than an expendable target.

Jesus saw something, someone different. He saw her in her need, in her shame. She didn't need someone else piling on guilt and accusation. She didn't need someone to feed into the bad agenda of these religious folks.

Jesus could have fallen in with the crowd. He could have taken an easier way out of this. He could have condemned, criticized, and shamed. Certainly the Law would have backed Him on this.

But He didn't.

He bucked everyone because they were wrong. He met her where SHE was at. And He responded with what she was ready to work on. He gave her forgiveness. He helped her see that she was no worse than anyone else, especially the ones accusing her. He didn't condone the adultery. Neither did He make her feel like dirt because of it. He just stood with her. Loved her. Forgave her. Then encouraged her to go and live better.

I've seen this in real time. I can't say I get this right all the time. I will share two times things seemed to lean this way.

In Johnstown when I ran a community drop in center a 14 year old girl came to me. She was hesitant not knowing what to expect from this religious guy but whatever we'd done to that point made her comfortable enough. She shared that she was pregnant and she waited tensely.

I just asked her how she was doing, what she needed, and what she needed to talk about. She talked about fearing telling her parents. About what the future would look like. About how she'd move forward as a young teen with a baby. She was worried she'd get judged. That she'd be scolded for making mistakes and sinning.

Receiving something else made all the difference. Every criticism I could have levelled she'd already been doing to herself over and over. Piling on wasn't helpful. Meeting her where she was at was. Whatever came later, she walked away knowing she was loved, supported, and that God hadn't written her off. God wasn't done with her yet.

In Baltimore I had a girl who was 16 I think that came to my office as chaplain. Thank God for her staff that encouraged her to take a chance. She was terrified of being told she was going to hell, was horrible and beyond redemption. Earlier in life she'd had an abortion. She needed to process it and was worried about it spiritually.

Not unlike the girl who came to me pregnant, we talked. What were her worries? What were her regrets? What was her internal conflict? Most importantly how had this impacted her relationship with God? She didn't need the thing she expected. She was ready to have an honest, deep conversation about much bigger things than accusations and value judgments.

She walked away if nothing else being reminded that God loved her. God could and would forgive any mistakes she'd made, whatever they might have been. The future was unwritten, and lessons learned could pave the way for a better and more faithful life before God.

If the scripture and the stories haven't made my sense clear, allow me to answer the main question we all should have at the end of a message. "So what?" What does this mean for me and my life?

I'll suggest two things.

First, anytime we have opportunity to engage with someone try to see where they are coming from. I may think they need an attitude or value adjustment. What they may be ready for is talking about their experience, what's on their mind, being understood, and hearing a perspective that's the same or different, but at least grounded in understanding them.

In other words it's not about me. Evangelism, love, compassion is almost always about the other. Meeting them with integrity where they are. Building bridges. Because if I meet you where you are it may take you a step closer to something you need to work out. In working that out it might lead you to working out whatever I'm perceiving. Or maybe not. Regardless the order of what we deal with in our faith and lives is unique to each unique individual. I don't get to pick your order and you don't get to pick mine.

Help me where I'm ready, I'll help you where you are and together we both move closer to God.

And realize that those who don't believe in Christ likely don't have the language, experience of stories, or regard for scripture that we do. We need to come in their own language, experience, and perspective to understand and be understood in return.

Two, take assurance and rest knowing that just like we need to meet others where they are, God has and will continue to meet us where we are.

Jesus met the disciples in their own messes of lives, work, and whatever. He met them through His ministry in their bullheadedness, misunderstanding, and confusion. Over and over. It wasn't until His resurrection that they were fully ready. All that time and teaching and finally it came together. But He didn't force it. He didn't rush it. He saw them as works in progress.

Guess what? So are we. We are all works in progress. Whatever our failures God will meet us there not as a hammer to fall, but as a redeemer looking to move us beyond those failures. Whatever our strengths and success God meets us there celebrating and encouraging us to push on.

We are inspired, encouraged, and led by God. But never forced. This is the adventure and the journey.

Take assurance and comfort in knowing you are loved by God wherever you are. In location, in life, in growth. Jesus is there to guide and redeem all through our lives. Then, as we accept this love and grace for ourselves, may we pass it along to the world around us. Meeting others where THEY are, and leading them to a greater relationship with God through Christ.

BIBLE STUDY Mark 5

This chapter continues on from the last. It is tempting to let chapter markers and verse markers and headings distract us. The story was written as one long story. The divisions we've placed sometimes get in the way.

The last story of chapter 4 was the calming of the sea. This story reminds us that a writer can convey two things at once. An event can be conveyed AND a theological message can be conveyed. What this means is that the story of the event is told in language that conveys much more.

The storm on the sea likely also represented the storm within the apostles. Crossing from a Jewish territory to a territory occupied by Jews but overwhelmed by Roman(Gentile) presence) was a frightening thought. They were popular with the Jews. How would they fare in this new, largely Roman influenced territory?

If Jesus gathered crowds where Roman patrolling was less prevalent and they were concerned what about where the Romans were strong? They were worried. The message? Jesus crosses the barrier between Jew and Gentile. It might get stormy but don't worry. Jesus ultimately can and will calm the storm.

They land on the other side of the sea and encounter this famous story of the man possessed by Legion. The story is very much a normal exorcism story in many ways. Mark has already shown us that Jesus has authority over the devil and the demons. This isn't a new thing. So the exorcism is pretty commonplace at this point. So what about the language sharing the event?

Notice that everything is unclean. Gentile, tombs and dead people, demons, pigs... all of it is unclean. What will Jesus do here? Can even He deal with this much filth? Yes. Of course He can. Jesus overcomes it and without one single ounce of aggression. He simply speaks and it's done.

Jesus has come to transform EVERYWHERE and EVERYONE.

The name Legion is telling. This area, the Decapolis had a heavy Roman presence. A Legion of troops was some 6,000 or so. That's a lot of Roman intimidation. What did the Romans do to every culture they encountered? They broke it, they destroyed it, they refused to be bound by it...just like the man in the tombs. So what did they do? Ultimately what they touched they destroyed. Even if they brought it to heel, they were a destructive presence.

Note that Jesus sends the unclean(Legion) into the unclean(pigs). They think that they will have a good run in like kind. Yet they do what they can't help but doing. They destroy. What they seek to occupy they ruin. They can't help it.

Yet in the whole situation the man is freed. Jesus delivers from oppression and destruction no matter how strong and present it is. History bears out the rest for Rome. They destroy themselves just like the demons in the pigs.

Unlike the other side of the sea Jesus tells the man to go and preach in the Decapolis. In the more Jewish friendly territory He tells them not to share His story. Here it's the opposite. Why?

Likely the risk of stirring up some kind of mass movement that would garner attention is less likely. The Roman oppression keeps things under wraps. Nevertheless the amazing wonder that had been worked would be able to marinate with those who heard it. The Kingdom of God is being spread into this Gentile heavy land. Why would the town want Him gone? It wasn't money. Many say the pigs were valuable and they were concerned what other economic impact Jesus might have. This isn't sensible. The people were likely Jewish in

faith which means the pigs held no intrinsic or major value.

Rather Jesus posed a danger because He challenged the dominating authority in that place. He freed the man from what was controlling him. What if that message spread? What if people got the idea they too could shake off their shackles? Keep in mind the spiritual intent of Jesus' mission wasn't evident even to His closest friends. Why would others be different?

To push freedom and power over the rulers was to risk certain death at the hands of the present Roman legion. Get Him out of there before He gets everyone killed!

So across the sea they go again. Bridging the gap between Jew and Gentile.

As He'd left the shore, He returns to a crowd gathered. One of the crowd is a synagogue leader with a sick daughter. He comes to ask Jesus aid in healing. The story is broken by the interlude with the famous story of the woman with the issue of blood.

Nameless, she is poor, her disease has afflicted her as long as the synagogue ruler's daughter has been alive, and she is desperate. Like the other side of the sea her issue of blood makes her wildly unclean. Yet she hopes. She has faith. As the crowd slows Jesus she reaches out to touch Him and is healed. He stops and acknowledges her. Her faith has saved her.

The time this takes is enough for the daughter to die. Arriving Jesus selects 3 disciples to come with Him, Peter, John, and James. Trying to assure the mourning crowd that the girl is asleep Jesus is mocked. He sends them out and resurrects the girl in the presence of this new inner circle of disciples and her parents.

Why does Mark space this out? What is he helping us see? This chapter is all about the breadth of Jesus' authority and the breadth of His love and mercy.

Jairus=wealthy, status, and privilege. Nameless woman=poor, lowly, unclean. BOTH are desperate. The need for Jesus respects no status, money, gender, or cleanness. Everyone has it. He is equally devoted to all, wanting to bring wholeness.

Nothing and no one are beyond the mercy of Christ.

What is required of each? Faith. The faith of the woman made her well with Christ. His reaction wasn't what she expected. She was unclean. She touched Him without permission. She snuck through the crowd defiling everyone whom she came into contact with. Yet not one word of scolding. None of that matters anymore. All that matters is someone needs and is willing to seek Him and reach out. Everything else be hanged Jesus will meet her where she is.

Even in death Jesus meets Jairus' daughter. He is hopeless. Jesus tells him to "believe". The mockers are driven away. The desperate (her parents), and the chosen few (Peter, James, and John) are invited to stay and witness this miracle.

What is Mark showing us? Jesus has power over the grave. This is a big theme and theological sensibility. Also, we see an inner circle forming within the inner circle of the twelve. These three will later bear witness to the transfiguration.

Once again, context matters. He is back in this heavier Jewish territory. Jesus once again tells the five gathered not to tell folks what happened. He can't afford yet to have even MORE fame and popularity stoking Roman curiosity. Especially with the former demoniac running around the Decapolis preaching. His identity and authority are slowly being made known. But He has a lot more work to do.

He's told them she's "just sleeping". She just was tired from her illness. Telling her to walk shows she's alive. Telling her to eat shows she just needs her strength to keep recovering. Perhaps this will be enough to fool the ones who laughed at Him?

Mark continues to build the story by centering on the identity and authority of Jesus. He is also dropping not subtle hints that this isn't just about the Jews. There's a Gentile thing going on here as well.

More than ever, we need to remember this wideness of God's mercy, compassion, and acceptance today. Whom the world rejects, Jesus welcomes with joy and openness.