

# What Really Matters?

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Preacher: Pastor Cathy Hall Stengel

[ 0 : 00 ]     ω Amen.

Amen. Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to Pendleton Center United Methodist Church. Just a couple of reminders or just information for anybody who happens to be new. Because we are trying to be as safe as we possibly can, we're not going to have any congregational singing.

So we're going to try to do things differently. But we invite you to rejoice in the singing on your heart. You can still participate in the music. You can meditate upon the words.

You can speak the words. You can hum the words. You can have the embodiment of the words. Whatever it is you feel compelled to do, we just ask that you not sing even with a mask on. So we're going to do this is the day that the Lord has made together as a responsive reading.

[ 2 : 25 ]     Because this is a beautiful day that the Lord has made. So let's do this together. Are you ready? This is the day. This is the day. That the Lord has made.

That the Lord has made. Let us rejoice. Let us rejoice. And be glad in it. And be glad in it. This is the day.

Let us pray. Holy God, we come before you today with honor and praise. We pray that your anointing will fall upon us and that we will be filled with your Holy Spirit, drawing us closer to you, loving you more, knowing you more. Lord, we pray that this service of worship will be a blessing to you and help us to be a blessing to others in this world through the transformation within us by your Spirit. For it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. And so I'd like to invite you all to stand if you're able and meditate upon the words, hum, speak, where charity and love prevail, their God is ever found.

Where charity and love prevail, their God is ever found. Brought here together by Christ's love, by love are we thus found. With grateful joy and holy fear, true charity we learn. Let us with heart and mind and strength, now love Christ in return. Love can exclude no race or greed, if honored be God's name.

Our common life embraces all whose maker is the same. Please be seated.

[ 4 : 45 ]     Good morning. It is good to see you on this beautiful morning. If we haven't met yet or if you're watching online, I'm Kathy Stengel, one of the pastors here at the church and also at Niagara Falls First.

Before, well, let's start here. The Lord be with you. And also with you. Let us give thanks. We give thanks to the Lord.

I asked a question. I asked it on my personal Facebook page. We put it on the Penfield United Methodist Church Facebook page. And the question was, what is most important to you? And the next part of that question was, has that changed at all in these last five months? And so throughout this service this morning and over these coming weeks, I will share some of those responses. And so I'm not going to read all of them to you right now, but I'm going to sprinkle some throughout the service this morning.

For me, what is clearer than ever is that my time with my grandchildren and my wife must increase, and my time working must decrease. I will seek a new kind of balance skewed in that way.

Another person says, more time and fewer things. Raising children up to know God's truth, quality time, and being present in the moment. Today is what I value most, because today is what we have.

[ 6 : 28 ] So I invite you to hold those things and continue to listen. And if you didn't get a chance to share, I welcome your offerings of what you find most important in this life.

Faith, the power of God, the presence of the Holy Spirit. We continue to find those to be just a magnificent inspiration in days that are different.

And so we do come before God. Gifts and offerings, thanksgivings, blessings, all that is important to us. And we provide a variety of options for all of us to be generous in our thanksgiving to God through this church and through mission and ministry. And I just invite you to consider all of those possibilities online.

You can always look at our website and visit these again. So just know, friendship cards, offering, blessings, prayer concerns, we want them all.

So we invite you to be in an attitude of worship as we sit and reflect on God's blessing at this time. Thank you.

[ 8 : 38 ] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Let's pray. Almighty God, we thank you for the gifts that we receive.

From you, our ruler of all that is seen and unseen, one who is so generous and free with all your good gifts. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray and ask. Amen.

Please receive. There is much to celebrate.

[ 10 : 18 ] This past Sunday, we had 15 confirmands decide to take that vow and become members of our church. And I'm just so incredibly proud of them.

We also, in the middle of that, had three baptisms. So we have, I'm just so proud of our confirmands. We've also had baptisms of babies. And we have our children's ministries opening up.

We have junior church today. So we've also got a newsletter coming out with lots of information in it. So keep your eyes open for that. There's just a lot going on. And I am grateful and I'm thankful for what God is doing.

God is doing some wonderful, wonderful blessings in our lives. We also want to, as we approach God in prayer, be mindful of people who are also hurting. So I lift up to you Mary Zupo, whose father passed away a few days ago, and the many other people who are struggling with different issues.

So let's go to the Lord in prayer together. Holy God, we come before you today. Humbly, seeking, searching, and exalting you.

[ 11 : 22 ] We pray that your anointing will come upon all of us at this time. That we will experience you powerfully. That the things that we've been carrying on our hearts, the joys we will celebrate, and the concerns you will hear and minister to us.

Lord, we pray that you will come and fill this place with your presence. We pray for those who are struggling physically. Those who are hurting, or have disease, or are experiencing pain.

We pray, Lord, that whatever is happening in people's bodies, that they're harmful and not the way you intended. That you will have your healing touch upon them. That they will receive healing in the name of Jesus, in their bodies.

And be restored and made whole. Lord, we pray for restoration of people's minds as people have been experiencing anxiety and depression. Lord, we pray that you will have your healing touch upon our minds.

That we will have the mind of Christ and have your peace. Have your will upon our minds, Lord. And be able to discern what is you and what is not.

[ 12 : 32 ] Lord, we pray that you will have healing upon our minds. Just as you also have healing upon our relationships, Lord. In this time when there is so much division, we pray that your presence and your peace will speak into our relationships.

Speak into the atmosphere of any brokenness, Lord. And bring healing. That people will be drawn together through your love, by your grace. Soften people's hearts, Lord, to be open to one another.

And Lord, we pray for healing for people with heavy hearts. Whether they're in mourning for the loss of a loved one. Or mourning for the loss of a relationship. Or mourning for loss of financial security.

Or whatever it may be, Lord. There are people with heavy hearts. And we lift them up to you, Lord. For your yoke is easy. Your yoke is light. And we pray that you will take these burdens, these concerns in our hearts, the worries in our minds.

And you will carry them for us. Releasing upon us instead your love and your grace to manifest within us. To bring your love and grace to one another.

[ 13 : 40 ] Lord, we pray for your healing upon us. We pray thank you for the joys and the blessings that you've given to us. And we pray that you will set upon our hearts an attitude of forgiveness.

An attitude of rejoicing. An attitude of your peace. An attitude of celebration of who you are and who we are in you. For you are good and we glorify you.

May we continue to grow in you. In your strength. And be a witness in Jesus' name. Amen. And now let's hear from the word of the Lord.

Good morning. Good morning. The scripture today is from Matthew chapter 5 verses 36. Matthew chapter 6 verses 36 through 46. I needed clothes and you clothed me.

I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me. Then the righteous will answer him. Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you?

[ 15 : 03 ] Or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in? Or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?

The king will reply. Truly, I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. Then he will say to those on his left, Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you did not invite me in.

I needed clothes and you did not clothe me. I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me. They also will answer, Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty?

Or a stranger or needing clothes? Or sick or in prison? And did not help you? He will reply, Truly, I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.

[ 16 : 19 ] Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life. This is the word of our Lord. Thanks be to God.

You might think if you were here or you watched. Hold that thought. But while you're holding that thought, I'm not holding on to much of anything right this minute.

You might be thinking, well, we just heard about that scripture just a couple of weeks ago. And so why would we be talking about it now? Well, just know that we acknowledge that it's the same part of the same scripture from a couple of weeks ago.

And we're going to look at it from a different angle this morning. I want to continue to share some of these most important things. God, my parents, my pets, relying on knowledge that God has a plan, and my head wants to know.

Now, myself, I matter. Trusting and obeying God, that hasn't changed, but how it is done has since March.

[ 17 : 53 ] God has this. God has this. God has me. God has all of us. So those are a few more of our reminders of what's most important.

The song that we used the first week when we introduced this series was Matthew West's Outside My Own Little World.

And in the last verse of that particular last section of that song, it says, Well, I don't want to miss what matters.

I want to be reaching out, showing the greater purpose so I could be living right now outside my own little world. Sometimes we think of outside my own little world as simply the feeding, the clothing, the visiting of those who are not us.

And one of the things that Sunday when we preached on this particular passage, I was at Niagara Falls, and both Scott and I preached on a similar aspect of, Well, what if outside my own little world is right next to me?

[ 19 : 10 ] What if the person who needs what matters most is my neighbor, my sibling, my spouse, my child, my relative, my neighbor?

In these familiar words of Jesus, there are three really profoundly important things. The first is the statement about God, the God of Jesus, the God of the Bible.

Not some remote being so far away on a throne that we can't imagine. Not up there in the clouds or in the mysterious reaches of the universe.

Jesus said, God is here in the messiness. In the messiness. Anybody have messiness in their life? I think people are resisting, admitting this morning, but we're just going to go with the fact that most all of us, if we look somewhere, maybe it's just in our kitchen or our closet, we'll find some messiness.

God is here. God is here in you, in your neighbor, in the one who needs you, and the question is, do you know what matters most? Do you recognize what matters most?

[ 20 : 30 ] In the list of things that people said, what you wouldn't find are the things that we see broadcasted in the news and the things that are current events.

It doesn't mean that they don't play into it. It just means that people are not saying, being right, winning, having the most, unless it's having the most care and compassion or whatever the case might be.

So what matters most? So we go on. You want to see the face of God? If we look at our scripture reading, you want to see the face of God?

Look around. And one of the challenges is, do we, when we look at neighbors, friends across the street, in the next yard, wherever we encounter them, do we look at them through the lens of this passage?

If I look at someone different than myself, and I open my eyes, and I'm awake to see the face of Jesus. Because the scripture says, if you feed the least of these, if you visit the least of these, if you care for the least of these, if you give water, then you did it to me.

[ 21 : 52 ] You did it for me. Because I am in that person. And when you can see my face in that person, then you'll understand what matters most.

Which isn't me here, person there, and kind of tossing over an occasional dollar, or a can of soup, or whatever, or even a card, or a note of compassion.

It's me seeing the face of Jesus in another person. The second statement, and I want to, I'm going to read this just because I want you to hear it clearly.

The second radical statement is about the practice of religion. You cannot read the paper and not be concerned about the role religion plays in the world.

When people shout out that God is great, then how does that look? If I proclaim, I'm a person of Christian faith, that's how I identify, that's how I live, that's how I love, then what do people see?

[ 23 : 06 ] Do they see that in me? Do they see the behavior and the activity of Jesus in what I do? And being mindful that no matter where we find ourselves, like it or not, it's like we might as well, you think about someone wearing a cross necklace, but never mind the jewelry.

We might as well, if we claim ourselves to be people of faith, to be saying, I look as much like Jesus as I can.

I act as much like Jesus as I can. I give as much like Jesus if I can, as I can. Does that mean that we can be Jesus?

No. Does that mean that we are called to give our lives the way Jesus did? Not necessarily. But look through the scriptures and see how Jesus encountered people.

How did Jesus encounter tax collectors, people who were lepers, people who were suffering from being unclean, people who were different, people who were rejected by common society?

[ 24 : 28 ] Yes. Jesus put his arms around them. I've shared this in other places, but I'm going to share it with you.

And if you've heard this before from me, then just give credit to my over-processing hard drive. But hear this. One of my first encounters with a community of people of faith was with college students at Geneseo.

We went on a retreat. And when we went on this retreat, and I was just new to everything, I'd never been on a retreat, never been to a church camp, never been, never been.

And we were invited. It was October. We all had coats with us. Well, they took a coat, one coat, and they had us in a circle.

And each person received the coat, and the directions were, treat this coat the way that you would treat Jesus. No, the way you would imagine Jesus treating you.

[ 25 : 34 ] You're Jesus. And the coat is you. And people shocked me. I was brand new at all of this. People shocked me.

They threw the coat on the ground. Some people walked on it. Some people picked every piece of lint off of it and folded it and made it perfect. And some people wouldn't even look.

Coat there, Jesus here, not even looking. So here was I, and I like to think of myself as being, let them be like little children, because I knew, and when the coat came to me, I just wrapped my arms around the coat and held it, because that's what I wanted the most.

That's what I imagined being the most important thing, was that if I were to encounter the living presence of Jesus Christ, the living presence of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, would wrap around me and hold all of me, my sins, my mistakes, my lack of faith, my lack of knowledge about the Bible, and he would hold it all.

And I would feel the acceptance, the grace, the peace, and therefore be energized to offer that to other people in my own very humble way of doing this.

[ 27 : 01 ] So when we are in this world, even at the various ways that we're in this world, what if we were to imagine the people that we encounter being us, and we respond to them the way that Jesus might respond to us.

Now that only works if you're not going to throw people in the corner and step on them and pick lint off of them. So I hope you hear that. That's my pastoral challenge. When you look at other people and you imagine yourself having the eyes of Jesus and see them through John 3.16, for God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son that whoever believes in him may not perish but have everlasting life.

The other part of that is looking at other people and seeing them as Jesus. Maybe you've heard the stories, there's been multiple stories about Jesus showing up disguised as someone who's homeless, poor, disabled, maybe smelly, coming into a church and watching how does the church respond to someone who's so different from them and then later discovering that in fact Jesus had come among them and how did they respond?

It's not a guilt trip. It's not. It's a call for us to find our way into what Jesus calls us to do and to be which is how do we treat our brothers and sisters?

Do we treat them as people we disagree with? therefore we avoid them? People who annoy us? We all have those people and we annoy them.

[ 29 : 06 ] People we know who are going to want to debate something that we don't want to get into or maybe we do want to get into. But what if we stop and say that's the face of Jesus.

How would I treat Jesus? Would Jesus condemn a person standing in front of them because they're wealthy or poor or beautiful or not so beautiful whether they're completely abled or whether they struggle with daily physical things?

Would Jesus look differently at someone who was this color that color this culture that race whatever it is?

Would we look at someone so different from us if we could imagine that's the face of Jesus? I don't know about you but I'd be scurrying around trying to make sure my arms are open there's a place to be hospitality and whatever Jesus would need.

Students of the New Testament know that one of the only descriptions of the final judgment is in Matthew 25. Final judgment.

[ 30 : 40 ] Did you feed, love, visit, give drink to the least of these whoever they might be.

Did you? Because if you did then you also did it for me. What was Jesus after?

What was Jesus after in this story? You see Jesus lived and walked and taught in a culture and in a society where everybody lived in a category.

Rabbis very sacred, very revered people of God. The teachers of the law very respected and very revered.

People who helped to maintain worship in the temple and do all of those things. But then there was a whole other world. If you had a chronic health condition, you know, leprosy was a common health condition back then.

[ 31 : 47 ] It just happened that there was no cure. We can cure it now. Outside the city gates. That's their version of quarantine was you go outside the city gates. A contagious illness.

Well, we understand that. But does that mean that person has no value? How do we care for a person who's quarantined? The other people that were cast out were people that were considered unclean.

And if you look through Leviticus, then have you ever been brave enough to read through Leviticus? Most people are not clean. Most of us would not qualify for being clean.

All of those people cast out. If you were a widow, you had nothing. You had nothing. If you were homeless, you had nothing.

even most if you were a stranger. And this is a lot of times what people don't understand. If you were a stranger, you got nothing.

[ 32 : 52 ] You were considered to be outside of acceptable. So, people of God, people of faith, faith, if we are called upon to think about what matters.

The list goes on. Grace, kindness, my family, my children. Several people who had new babies this year put pictures of those new babies because they have this revelation in having these children that they now know that this child is now the most important part of their lives.

do we live? Do you live? Do I live? And I have to ask myself this question. Do I live my life in a way that demonstrates that not only do I know what is most important to me, but I live that way?

Years and years ago, we had a bishop, Bishop Forrest Stith, and he gathered all of us together, all of us clergy, and we were told to bring our calendars.

And so we brought our calendars, and we're like, well, are we going to be putting something on it? What do we need to do? And he said, open your calendar. So we opened our calendars. He said, but now I want you to turn it over.

[ 34 : 12 ] So we turned it over. He said, I want you to write down on a little piece of paper what is most important to you. What is most important to you?

So we went through that, and then he said, now flip that calendar back over. And we did. And he said, how does that work? You said this was what was most important.

Does your calendar make it look like that? If you said your family is most important, but you have yourself locked into work every minute of every day, where's your family?

Where's your family? family? If you say that recreational time, or devotional time, or church time, Bible study, whatever that might be in the community of faith is most important, well where is it?

Not where is it you pastors who are leading all those things, where is it you pastors who are tending to your own need for these things?

[ 35 : 16 ] There were a lot of us who sat there and kind of went like this. Because we recognized that maybe it didn't connect, that what we valued most barely had a blip on our calendars.

and so, how do we do that? Part of it is we remember.

What if there's a greater purpose that I could be living right now? I don't want to miss what matters. I want to be reaching out, showing the greater purpose so I could be living right now outside of my own little world.

So very briefly I'm going to say what are the things that make us close our world down? Fear, suffering, loss, anxiety, depression, joblessness, things like that.

They make us shut our lives down. I hope in prayer is that we as people of faith who have our eyes open might see those people, might see the hearts closed, the lives locked, the sadness shut down and offer water or food.

[ 36 : 52 ] But for many of us, our lives get small when we're overwhelmed and we can't cope with all of the different things that are coming our way.

And during these last six months, eight months, nine months, however it is, we've been bombarded every time, all the time. And so what this invitation is, what matters most and turn away from that which will dismantle your world towards what matters most.

Because I can promise you, I can promise you that whether it's a phone call, a prayer, a visit, out in somebody's yard, whatever it is, I'm going to tell you that you're going to feel more life and more hope and more like you encounter Jesus when you live in those spaces.

Because when our world becomes our own little world, it becomes about us. it becomes about what bothers us, annoys us.

So we step out. We check in on other people's worlds. We just randomly help someone or smile at someone, mask and everything.

[ 38 : 18 ] I saw someone the other day and they said, I know you. I was like, oh, really? Like, we know each other? Because, you know, I still don't know a lot of people. And they said, those eyes, they smile at us behind your mask at church and in other places that we are.

These masks, they don't hide our hearts. They just hide our mouths and our nose. So as people of faith, let's do two things this week.

What matters most? And when you look around, do you see the face of Jesus and other people? Try it on.

See how it goes. And your heart will be warmed and melted and you will have no choice but to show compassion. Let us pray.

Lord, I don't want to miss what matters. I don't want to be a person who is worried about myself or even my family so much that I am blinded to those around me.

[ 39 : 36 ] but I need your help and I need the Holy Spirit to lift my eyes and lift my heart to see beyond signs and sometimes behavior and sometimes physical characteristics.

I need your help and your Holy Spirit to lift my eyes to see you in every person, in every place.

and respond as if I were responding to you. Oh Lord, we pray and may it be so.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Go light your world.

It's one of those songs where if you're going to meditate upon any words, meditate upon this and let the Holy Spirit light your world to light the world in others.

[ 41 : 01 ] there is a candle in every soul some brightly burning some dark and cold there is a spirit who brings a fire ignites a candle and makes his home so carry your candle run to the darkness seek out the hopeless confused and torn hold out your candle for all to see it take your candle your light your world take your candle your light your world frustrated brother see how he's tried to light his own candle some other way see now your sister she's been robbed and lied to still hold her candle without a frame carry your candle run to the darkness seek out the world of time and war hold out your candle love to see it take your candle

Lord I do take your candle Lord I do we are going to have you whose hearts are blazing let's raise our candles light up the sky pray to our Father in the name of Jesus make us Bradley close ■■

Your light your world Carry your candle Run to the darkness Sing of the hopeless The peace and joy Pull out your candle For all to see Take your candle Your light your world Take your candle Your light your world One of God's great gifts to us



Is the sacrament of Holy Communion The way in which we can Know and experience God  
In a way that is more tangible To some of us But is also precious In all the ways We can  
experience God So as we come to the table Let's be in line To receive that gift From our  
Lord The Lord be with you And also with you Lift up your hearts Lift up your hearts Let us  
give thanks To the Lord our God It is right to the Lord It is right A good and joyful thing  
Always and everywhere We give thanks to you Almighty God Creator of heaven and earth  
You formed us in your image And breathed into us The breath of life When we turned  
away And our love failed Your love remained steadfast You delivered us from captivity  
Made covenant to be

Our sovereign God And spoke to us Through your prophet Who looked for that day When  
justice shall roll down Like waters And righteousness Like an ever-flowing stream When  
nations shall Not lift up sword Against nations Neither shall they learn war Anymore And  
so with your people on earth And all the company of heaven We praise your name And lift  
your unending hymn Holy, holy, holy Lord God of power and mind Heaven and earth Are  
full of your glory Hosanna in the highest Blessed is he who comes In the name of the Lord  
Hosanna in the highest Holy are you And blessed is your son Jesus Christ Your spirit  
anointed him To preach good news To the poor To proclaim relief

[ 47 : 36 ] To the captives And recovering of sight To the blind To set at liberty Those who are  
oppressed To announce To announce that the time Had come When you would save  
Your people He healed the sick Fed the hungry And ate with sinners By the baptism Of his  
suffering And death And resurrection You gave birth To your church Delivered us from  
slavery To sin and death And made with us A new covenant By water And the spirit At his  
ascension You exalted him And to sit And reign With you At your right hand On the night  
In which he gave himself Up for us He took bread Gave thanks to you Broke the bread  
Gave it to his disciples

And said Take and eat For this is my body Which is given for you Do this In remembrance  
of me When the supper was over He took the cup Gave thanks to you Gave it to his  
disciples And said Drink from this All of you For this is the blood Of the new covenant  
Poured out for you And for many For the forgiveness Of sin Do this as often As you drink  
In remembrance Of me And so In remembrance Of these Your mighty acts In Jesus Christ  
We offer ourselves In praise And thanksgiving As a holy And living sacrifice In union With  
Christ's Offering for us As we proclaim The mystery Of faith Christ has died Christ is risen  
Christ will come again But pour out your spirit

On us gathered here And on these gifts Of bread And wine Make them be for us The body  
and blood Of Jesus Christ That we may be For the world The body of Christ Redeemed  
By his blood And by your spirit Make us one with Christ One with each other And one in  
ministry To all the world Until Christ comes In his final victory And we feast At his heavenly  
bank Through your son Jesus Christ With the Holy Spirit And in your holy church All honor  
And glory Is yours Almighty Father Now and forever Amen And now With the confidence  
Of the children of God Let us pray together The prayer That Jesus taught us Our Father  
Who art in heaven Hallowed be thy name Thy kingdom come Thy will be done

On earth As it is in heaven Give us this day Our daily bread And forgive us Our trespasses  
As we forgive those Who trespass against us And lead us not into temptation But deliver  
us from evil For thine is the kingdom And the power And the glory Forever Amen As we go  
from this place I like you to hold on to that image When I have sung in the past That song  
Go light your candle Even when we didn't have candles We put our fingers up like this  
Can you guys do that?

One hand or the other Can you put your finger up? As you go from this place I want you to go And be reminded If your flame is lit Then light another one's candle If your flame is out Go looking for someone Whose is lit And light your unlit candle From the candle that shines For surely The light and the love Of God the Father The Son And the Holy Spirit Lights our way So let's go light this world We will invite you To receive communion As you leave And we invite you To remain seated Until the ushers Tell you when it's time To go And we'll meet you At the door And we'll meet you To be continued To be continued To be continued

[ 52 : 39 ] To be continued To be continued And we'll meet you To be continued And we'll meet you To be continued Moving night You're welcome To be continued To be continued Job To be continued To be continued■■■■ hymn One of the things Of this day And we're probably to TTI Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.