

Date: February 4, 2018

Scripture: Mark 1:29-39

Title: THE MEANING OF EVERYTHING!

Welcome to this special liturgical holy day known as Super Bowl Sunday. I heard about one young guy who is really in a difficult situation. He bought two tickets for today's Super Bowl far in advance. He forgot that he and his fiancé had scheduled their wedding for this same day and time. Now he realizes he can't go. It's out of the question. So, if you're interested and want to go instead of him, here's the relevant information: it's at St. Peter's Church in New York City at 5 p.m. Her name's Louise. She'll be the one wearing a white dress.

Even pastors can get caught up in Super Bowl fever. I heard about one Presbyterian Church where the time for collecting the offering was approaching. The minister, a true sports enthusiast, reached into his pocket, took out a quarter, flipped it into the air, glanced at it as it landed, then in typical referee fashion joyfully announced: "The ushers will receive!"

In today's scripture story, Jesus heals Simon Peter's mother-in-law of a fever. Do you ever think of Simon Peter as being married? Obviously he was. I wonder how his wife felt about his giving up his occupation, leaving everything and following Jesus?

In any case, Simon Peter had a mother-in-law, and that evening after sunset, after Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law, Mark tells us the people of the area brought to Jesus all their sick and demon-possessed. In fact, the whole town was gathered at his door.

Think of that, "The whole town was gathered at the door . . ." I guess this was the first century equivalent of a flash mob. They didn't communicate by Facebook or Twitter or Snapchat. They had to do it the old-fashioned way, person to person. But it worked. The whole town gathered at his door. Everyone wanted to see Jesus.

The next morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place where he prayed. That's important! No matter how pressing his calendar, no matter how many people needed him, Jesus took time to pray. Sounds like he was setting an example for us. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

To me that makes sense. I don't know how to say this without it sounding like a platitude or a cliché, but I really do believe that **deep down all people everywhere are looking for Christ**. They may not know his name, and they might use religious symbols and terminology that are different from what you and I would use, but they're looking for Christ all the same.

Everybody needs meaning in their lives. Everybody needs something to believe in, something to guide them. Otherwise they wake up one day and realize that

nothing in life makes sense. They could think to themselves, we're simply born, live out our time on earth, and then die. There's no meaning to love, no meaning to sorrow, no meaning to life itself.

Some of you may remember a very famous French existentialist novelist named Albert Camus. He was one of the twentieth century's most famous skeptics. There's evidence that, toward the end of his life, he discovered an emptiness in his life, an emptiness that nothing could fill. Consequently he began attending the American Church in Paris. He even discussed the possibility of baptism with the pastor.

He told the Pastor, "The reason I have been coming to church, is because I am seeking. I'm almost on a pilgrimage, seeking something to fill the void that I am experiencing, no one else knows. Certainly the public and the readers of my novels, while they see that void, are not finding the answers in what they're reading. Camus said, "But deep down you're right. I am searching for something that the world isn't giving me."

What neither Camus nor his readers understood is that, nothing in this world CAN satisfy their search for meaning. There's only one person who can do that. His name is Jesus. In order to have a satisfying life, we must have meaning in our life. His disciples came to Jesus and said, "Everyone is looking for you!"

I believe that's true, whether we recognize it or not. Everyone is seeking Christ. He's the truth, the way, the life. This is revealed in the narrative that follows. After his disciples told Christ that everyone was looking for him, the Master replied, "Let us go somewhere else, to the nearby villages, so I can preach there also. That's why I have come."

Why did Christ come into our world? **He came to share his message of love and forgiveness with the world. He came to give us the key to a very big secret. It's the good news that life does have meaning.** We're not alone in this world with no key to its meaning.

Dr. Daniel Liroy tells about a bronze statue of Professor Einstein at the west end of Constitution Avenue in Washington, D.C. The statue is 21 feet tall. Einstein's figure is seated, wearing a baggy sweater, wrinkled corduroy trousers, and sandals. His hair is in familiar disarray.

"At Einstein's feet is a map of the universe, a 28-foot square slab of granite in which 2,700 small metal studs are embedded. Each stud represents the location in the sky of a planet, major star, or familiar celestial body at noon on April 22, 1979, the time the memorial was dedicated.

"The expression on the face of Einstein's statue is a mixture of wisdom, peace, and wonder. The face reflects the serenity of a man, who believed a divine mind had conceived the universe, he spent his life trying to understand. He would tell his

colleagues who believed in a random universe, ‘God does not play dice with the universe.’” Einstein never dismissed the possibility of the existence of God.

Albert Einstein, perhaps the smartest man who ever lived, died without ever being able to read the mind of God, but I tell you that any of our young people or any of our old folks, can find the key to the meaning of everything. **IT’S CHRIST. IT’S JESUS CHRIST AND HIS LOVE FOR ALL OF US.**

He’s the light that shines in the darkness. He’s the hope that never fails. He’s the life that never ends. He’s the key to the secret of life. When we join our life with his, we find everything we need for a complete life. What Christ gives us is not an easy-to-follow three-step plan to a more satisfying life. What he gives us is much better. He gives us himself.

I understand there’s a sign as you walk down the stairs toward the baggage claim area of the Memphis, Tennessee Airport. Memphis was the place singer Elvis Presley called home. On the sign in the Memphis airport is the motto of Graceland, the former home of the king of rock and roll. The sign reads: “Discover Your Inner Elvis.”

I don’t know if we have any Elvis fans in this congregation or not. But far more important, than discovering our inner Elvis, is the opportunity you and I have to discover our inner Jesus. He’s our only hope for making sense out of life and giving us a sense of meaning and purpose. And the formula he gave us for a successful life is so simple: love God and love your neighbor.

Robert Wuthnow tells the story of Jack Casey, a rescue squad worker. Casey had a difficult childhood. He once said, “All I ever learned from my father is I didn’t want to be like him.” Casey was raised in a tough home, the son of an alcoholic father. But something happened to Jack when he was a child that changed his life.

There came a time when Jack needed to have surgery and he was terrified. He remembered the nurse who remained by his side, holding his hand, reassuring him that everything would be okay. She told him, “I’ll be right here, no matter what. She kept her word; she was there and greeted him with a smile the moment he opened his eyes.

Years later, Jack became a paramedic and was called to the scene of an accident. A man was pinned upside down in his pickup. Jack did his best to free him even as gasoline dripped down on them. The man was afraid that he was going to die as the rescuers worked to free him. All it would take would be one spark to send the whole scene up in flames.

Jack remembered back to that time when he was a child and the nurse who never left him. He took the man’s hands and squeezed them as he said, “Don’t worry! I’m right here with you! I’m not going anywhere!” Days later, the rescued truck driver said to Jack, “You know, you were an idiot, the thing could have exploded and we’d both have been burned up!” Jack said, “I just couldn’t leave you.”

That's why there's meaning to life. There's one who will never leave us no matter what the situation. And he calls us to share the same kind of love and compassion to everyone we meet. Don't go through life believing that the secret to life is locked up somewhere with no key available for the likes of you and me. There is a key. His name is Jesus. Live with the key of life (Jesus Christ) Trusting, Believing, and having an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.