

“This Is It!”

Micah 6:1-8; I Corinthians 1:18-31; Matthew 5:1-12

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Mary Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church, Milford, Connecticut

The Rev. Dr. Brian R. Bodt, Pastor

“Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed. Every morning a lion wakes up. It knows it must outrun the slowest gazelle or it will starve to death. It doesn’t matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle: when the sun comes up, you’d better be running.” (1)

On this week when the Dow Jones Industrial Average topped 20,000 for the first time, it seemed right to recall this quote. The “Economist” magazine reported it in 1985 as part of an address by Dan Montano, a securities analyst, to stockbrokers and bankers at a London conference on financial technology. It has since been popularized in writing by “San Francisco Chronicle” columnist Herb Caen (1988), author Thomas Friedman in The World Is Flat (2005), and in numerous videos and posters used in motivational psychology. According to the 1999 book Inside Home Depot, it hung outside a conference room next to the office of Arthur M. Blank, a co-founder of the retail giant Home Depot.

What does this quote, sounding Darwinian with its “survival of the fittest” overtones, have to do with Christian faith? Simply this: it is not enough for the Christian to wake up. We’d better be running. We must seek life with passion. So what is it? What is your driving passion? What makes you smile when you look in the mirror? What is it that others see motivating you? What has God called you to do?

(1) The Stock Exchange: Deregulation and New Technology,” Oyez International Business Communications, London, June 5th and 6th, 1985 as found at www.quoteinvestigator.com

Today's scriptures invite us to embrace God's passion for righteousness and justice. Micah famously declares we are to "do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God." Paul reminds the fractious church in Corinth that God's passionate and sacrificial love on the cross unites them. This love, he says, is "foolishness:" scandal to the Jews, folly to the Gentiles, but for those who believe, the power of God and the wisdom of God. And Jesus' teaching we call "The Beatitudes, " (supreme blessedness), reminds us that among those blessed are those persecuted for righteousness' sake and reviled for his sake.

Some years ago I was privileged to hear Bishop James K. Mathews tell how the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. came to his Christian practice of non-violence. It is well known that Dr. King was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's teaching of non-violence. Mahatma Gandhi was an Indian Hindu whose teaching and leadership led to nationhood for India in 1947. He was a Hindu who actively considered becoming a Christian, except he saw our faith as it was practiced in South Africa during the days of apartheid: racial separation and oppression.

What is less well known is HOW Dr. King was inspired by Gandhi. The answer is displayed in The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Non-Violent Social Change in Atlanta. There you can see Dr. King's personal copy of a biography of Gandhi written by E. Stanley Jones. Dr. Jones was the great Methodist missionary to India and the father-in-law of Bishop Mathews. In that biography, Dr. Jones quotes Gandhi "*Non-violence is not a weapon of the weak, but of the strong.*" And next to that quote, in Dr. King's handwriting, are the words "This is it!"

"This is it!" "*Non-violence is not a weapon of the weak but of the strong.*" How many of us really believe that? Or do we believe that might makes right, that if you want something you have to grab it, or that—God forgive us for you'll never find this in Holy Scripture—"God helps those who help themselves?"

Gandhi's statement that became Dr. King's passion is a practical expression of the passions expressed in scripture. The Christian is to "do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God." The Christian is to have the strength to be a peacemaker, poor in spirit, merciful, pure in heart: virtues that the world regards as weak and softhearted. Yet those virtues are weapons of the strong, expressed most perfectly in the sacrificial love of Jesus revealed on the cross.

There ought to be a warning label on this Book, especially Matthew 5: "Warning! Living these scriptures will forever change your life." Beware! Jesus turns upside down our whole understanding of supreme blessedness. He does so because he says that intense dissatisfaction with "the way things are" is not a vice but a virtue. Jesus says, in effect, "Don't be satisfied with spiritual mediocrity. Be dissatisfied with spiritual emptiness, spiritual apathy and spiritual passivity. I want you to have more and I want you to be running for it."

For most of us, this process—Methodism calls it "sanctification," growing deeper in love and holiness—is not a one-shot deal. It's an on-going process that comes with choosing to follow Jesus. It comes with examining our conscience and our ultimate values. And it is expressed in corporate and individual behaviors.

Carol and I participated in the Stamford, CT gathering for last Saturday's world-wide "Women's March." Some of you did, too, in Hartford and New York. Motivation for non-violent witness is likely as diverse and personal as those participating, and one's sense of what is right. For Carol and I, it was and remains an extension of our Christian calling as we understand it: to do justice, to love mercy and walk humbly with God.

There are many ways to live non-violent justice. Some of us, by temperament or conviction, are not comfortable in the

public arena. Still, we can temper words. Limit Facebook posts. Engage in constructive dialogue and view those with whom we speak as children of God. We can choose restraint.

Or we can participate in the corporate work of the church to do justice. At Church Council, Eileen Doyle reported that our combined efforts – general budget, United Methodist Women, Men’s Club, Methodist Youth Fellowship – contributed well over \$90,000 to various mission projects in 2016. That’s you, and me, helping others, most of whom we will never meet.

Still, there are those we DO meet. Many recall the United Methodist Women giving out 50 \$5 Subway gift cards last fall and inviting us to find an opportunity to give one to a person in need. Subsequently, even more were provided. One of those cards was recently given by Tom Beyer, who wrote of that experience to Sue O’Shea, United Methodist Women president:

[On Inauguration Day] I witnessed a very thin man digging into the trash receptacles in Grand Central [Terminal] looking for some remnants of food. I began to walk away. But then turned back.

I reached into my bag, took out my \$5 Subway gift card, handed it to him, encouraged him to go purchase something to eat, and as I walked away said a prayer for him.

I had been waiting for the right moment and found it today. Thank you: to you and the U[nited] M[ethodist] W[omen]. It helped me to believe again in the prevailing power of love.

It is not enough to wake up. We have to be running. What is your passion? Are you living it? And is it the passion of Jesus? This is it: to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Amen.