

This Really Matters
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First Congregational United Church of Christ
Luke 18:1-8
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I think you would agree that this past year a light has shined into the deepest recesses of our country's soul and what we have discovered has shocked and alarmed us. And so, I believe our theme for our Stewardship Campaign is particularly helpful and timely.

Refresh! – Find Comfort in this place and strength within this fellowship!

Restore! – Bring back God's Vision for this world through faith-filled and justice-oriented actions.

Rejoice! – For we are indeed blessed by the ministry so, let us strengthen our ability to impact people's lives with God's love!

This morning I would like to offer a brief meditation on our second command...to restore!

Please first join me in prayer.

God of Justice, we know that in this hard world there are too many who neither honor you, nor respect their brothers or sisters. We celebrate this morning all those, women and men, who persist in the cause of right; who will not keep quiet; who insist on raising the issues, again and again. We celebrate the members of this church: steadfast, down-to-earth, blessed with both stubbornness and courage, who for over 127 years have faithfully endeavored to change the world. Help us celebrate as we continue this journey of faith! Amen.

If there was ever a time to proclaim it folks it is NOW! This really matters. Our faith in a loving God, who offers a radical embrace to all of God's children, MATTERS. Our willingness to stand up to injustice whether it is found in the streets of our cities, in the bedrooms of our homes, or in the confines of our locker rooms, MATTERS! Our efforts to honor and lift up all of God's children no matter who they are or where they find themselves on life's journey, no matter who they love or how they choose to worship, no matter how badly they may be judged in the eyes of society, MATTERS.

Folks, this really **MATTERS!**

Last night, as I wrote my notes to our Fourth Graders in their new Bibles, I found that I had so much I wanted to say to our dear ones.

I wanted to let them know that, in the giving of this sacred gift, the church is trying to live out its challenging call to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. I wanted them to understand that they belong to a community of faith that has historically stood up for the person who had been seen by others as somehow less than... That they were part of a church family that has remained persistent in its efforts to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God. I wanted them to know that the Bible they were receiving in their hands, and the church that was embracing them on this day, and the faith we lift up every day, MATTERS!

Because at the core of our faith is a belief that the work must continue to make this world a more just place!

It hasn't always been easy but it has remained an integral part of our DNA. We have been a church that has tried hard to honor, not just given lip service to, the valuing of all people. From the very beginning! For the few who have not heard me say this yet... The very first Bylaws of this church in 1889 included this statement: That at least one of the three head lay leaders of the church, known as Trustees, at least one, had to be a woman!

Is this rare? You bet it is! I served a church once where the women were not allowed to act as true Deacons of the church, but rather were relegated to the role of Deaconess, and given the tasks deemed more appropriate to their gender, namely that of washing the communion cups, cleaning the chancel area and polishing the silver. And this rule remained in effect until 1989!

We worship in a very different church! The seeds of justice were sown into the very heart and soul of our church from its inception. Believe me, I know there was a price to pay for the boldness of their efforts. But, they did it anyway, because it mattered.

Yes, there is so much I could have written to our fourth graders. The fact that we have been an open and affirming congregation for almost 30 years when the majority of UCC churches haven't found the courage yet to make such a claim. Almost 3/4 of our sister churches in this denomination are not open and affirming... yet.

I wanted to share how this church has provided educational opportunities to children in El Salvador who would have had nothing past the eighth grade. We have helped people off the street and into homes of their own. We have offered food for the hungry, and hope for the lost and forgotten time and time again.

But, I didn't have enough time or space.

So, let me lift up one more thing we do here at First Congregational Church that is especially important given the news of the day, and something I hope our fourth graders will benefit from in just four years. OWL Our Whole Lives.

For the past 12 years, through the gifted leadership of Melanie and many lay leaders, we have offered a program that helps our young people embrace their gender identity and celebrate themselves as sexual beings.

This program provides not only facts about anatomy and human development, (much to the relief of some nervous parents) but helps our children clarify their values, build interpersonal skills and understand the social, emotional and spiritual aspects of sexuality. It is a ministry offered with the expressed goal of helping our young people make informed, responsible, respectful decisions for themselves and the people around them.

So that, if our young people find themselves in a situation where the banter of peers is growing increasingly uncomfortable or demeaning of others, while, let's just say, riding on a bus, they will at the very least have the maturity and good sense not to participate, and hopefully have the moral fortitude to shut it down!

BECAUSE IT MATTERS!

Friends as we make our way into Stewardship Season...know that you will find the comfort in this place and the strength within this fellowship you will need for the living of these days! Seek steadfastly to bring back

God's Vision for this world through your faith-filled and justice-oriented actions. Help us strengthen our ability to impact and cherish the lives of all people with the gift of God's love!

Refresh! Restore! And Rejoice! Because the journey continues! And we are all part of something that REALLY matters! Amen!

Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. ²He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. ³In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' ⁴For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" ⁶And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? ⁸I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"