Change Your Mind

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*“And he said to them, ‘ Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things. What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ He answered, ‘I will not,’ but later changed his mind and went.”*

Matthew 21:23-32

Have you ever changed your mind about someone and realized that your first assumptions about them or whatever you felt about them for a really long time was wrong? Well, this message is about the power of changing our minds. There is power in changing our minds about how we judge others and how we judge ourselves. Too often, our first assumptions about others or even our belief in ourselves is incorrect.

First of all, Jesus loves questions. He invited and welcomed them from his disciples and followers and it’s totally fair to keep questioning God. God isn’t afraid or made smaller by our questions. The deeper our questioning, the more we can develop a relationship with the divine. We are in relationship when we question. Why God? Why is my beloved family member suffering and dying? Why do my family members struggle so much? Why can’t I find more patience? When will you ever step in and sort things out God? Keep asking these questions. They are part of a beautiful, healthy prayer life and relationship with God.

Know that you and I are in good company with the disciples. They asked Jesus, who do you love the most among the twelve of us. (18:1) Is there a good deed we can do to gain eternal life and go straight to heaven. (24.3) and how often do I need to forgive someone who hurt me. (18.21) And we left everything to follow you, what am I going to get in reward for all this following your lead to drop our nets and travel in poverty around the countryside. (19.27)They were testing Jesus out. How much do you really love us Jesus? Can we push you too hard? If we misbehave, threaten you and even turn you over to the authorities, will you still love us?

Jesus gets us! He got a lot of the same questions from his disciples.

In today’s lectionary reading, Jesus turns the questioning back on his disciples. He asks them a few of his own questions like, “Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?” Jesus wants to know what they really thought about baptism. Did they believe that God is in the midst with them, blessing and transforming lives or was this baptism by water simply a silly little water bath done by some hairy dude named John living out near the River Jordan.

And then, Jesus starts up with his parables again. This time it’s about two sons who go to the vineyard. Neither son wanted to work in the vineyard. It was probably hot, they may not have wanted to go and work for their parents. And yet, the first son said, no, I will not go. Later he changed his mind and went to work. This is the part I want to focus on. This son c*hanged his mind.*

How often have we needed to change our minds when at first we said no. No, I won’t go and do something new. No, I don’t want to learn about others who look different, act different, or believe differently than I do. And often, we need to change our mind about ourselves.

Too often, our mind can tell us stories about our worth that aren’t true. Sometimes the stories we tell ourselves come from childhood trauma, mental illness, or believing the lies others may have told you about whether you are worthy. Jesus and God invite us to change our minds. When I think about this aspect of changing the tapes that we play in our heads that aren’t true, that aren’t healthy and definitely not how God sees us as worthy of love and blessed indeed, I keep humming the songs of Dear Evan Hansen the musical.

A quick synopsis of the musical begins with Evan Hansen, a 17 year old who is bullied and is living with anxiety, depression and a broken arm. It’s the start of a new school year and he doesn’t want to go back to school. His mom and therapist beg him to start writing letters to himself that about how today is going to be a good day. If you haven’t seen the musical, you can watch it on Netflix, but I can’t help but sing the song “You Will Be Found” that speaks so beautifully about how even if you are thinking about suicide and the question, “have you ever felt like nobody was there?” that isn’t true!

Evan creates this song in response to a classmate’s suicide and it goes viral. Everyone is sharing it across the school and then online. The refrain invites the listener to hear that

“Even when the dark comes crashing through

When you need a friend to carry you

And when you’re broken on the ground

You will be found

So let the sun come streaming in

‘Cause you’ll reach up and you’ll rise again

Lift your head and look around

You will be found”1

This is the call to realize that if the story we are telling in our head isn’t healthy, if it’s one that we don’t matter or that our existence doesn’t matter, change our minds. You will be found. God needs you. We, your friends and neighbors, parents, and church members, we need you. Change your mind. Recognize that our first thoughts may not be our best thoughts.

So, change your mind.

Steve Gregory sang a song called “Change Your Mind” today by the band Sister Hazel. In this song, we are encouraged to change our minds about how the day, and our lives can go. We can feel better about today and tomorrow ,so that we see that we matter, that we don’t need to be anybody else. And that we glow. So let’s shine.

I have a fabulous colleague named the Rev. Sarah Lund who is a pastor at a local church in Indianapolis and the Minister for Disabilities and Mental Health Justice for the United Church of Christ. Sarah’s family story includes a lot of mental illness and health challenges and she has written some amazing resources for individuals, couples and children.

I have three of her books here with me today: Blessed Union: Breaking the Silence about Mental Illness and Marriage, Blessed Youth: Breaking the Silence about Mental Illness with Children and Teens and Blessed Youth: a Survival Guide. All of these are free and available for anyone who wants to check them out or keep them. They are in the church library or you can grab one today.

Lund reminds us that “in the Bible there are more healing stories about the human troubles we now identify as mental illness than all other healing stories combined. In all of them, Jesus’ response to mental illness is to engage people and show compassion. Suicide is referred to in the Bible multiple times, including the story of Jesus’ disciple Judas who died by suicide (Matthew 27:3-5)

What Lund encourages youth and adults alike to do is ask for help and change your mind if things get rough. She includes a love letter to you from your blessed mind in her survival guide. That’s the thing, God needs you. God needs every one of us. If someone you love is going through a hard time, and the stories they are telling themselves aren’t healthy, we as a community need to help support them as they change their mind.

Lund reminds all of us to see how blessed we are and to reach out for help. Changing our mind does not simply mean waking up with a positive attitude. It frequently requires therapy, seeing your physical, mental and spiritual health as connected.

In this church, we support and encourage people to go to their physicians and the hospital when they are physically ill. We believe and practice the same support for mental illness. Our mental health is as important as our physical health. Too often in churches and generally in society, we haven’t lifted them up at the same level. Cancer, death, and physical illnesses are frequently surrounded with prayer and casseroles delivered through meal trains and support, while families and individuals living and struggling with mental illness stay silent and may even feel shame. These are the illnesses where no one delivers a casserole.

Let me say right now, if you or someone in your family is going through a hard time and a casserole would be helpful, let me know and we can make it happen. You and your family are not alone. Jesus always cared for and reached out to heal those who were suffering with mental illness. Today we have medicines and therapies to help treat mental illness as well as the love and support of this church community, hopefully counselors and therapists available to help out.

Some of our struggles are for a moment and some are life-long challenges, and yet, may we always remember that Jesus invites us to change our mind and see that we matter. That we are loved. No one is outside of the circle. May you and I and everyone who has ever struggled at times in our lives remind one another to stay around, to change our mind and see how much the world needs us.

Jesus brought everyone, especially those who were seen as other, the enslaved, women or children who were victims of human trafficking, the tax collector caught up in bullying and being bullied in a political system of violence over to control the other, he brought everyone into his circle of discipleship and love. All were equal. All were loved. All mattered. As do you, as do I, as even those I have seen as my enemy. We are invited to change our mind and see clearly how loved we are and how beautiful this world is, even with all the brokenness, sorrow and challenge of being human. You are loved! Amen.

1<https://www.google.com/search?q=lyrics+to+you+will+be+found&oq=lyrics+to+you+will+be+found&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyCQgAEEUYORiABDIHCAEQABiABDIICAIQABgWGB4yCAgDEAAYFhgeMggIBBAAGBYYHjIICAUQABgWGB4yCAgGEAAYFhgeMggIBxAAGBYYHjIICAgQABgWGB4yCAgJEAAYFhge0gEINTI4NmowajeoAgCwAgA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>