

Calvary United Methodist Church  
February 17, 2019

**CAN WE TALK?**  
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

**Children's Message:**

John 21:15-17

I invite our children to come forward at this time for the children's message. Would the children like to come forward? Great to have you all here today. I want to chat a little bit today about the gifts that God gives us. Do you know you have a lot of gifts? When someone gives you a gift do they usually take it back? No. It's for you. And God makes a lot of preparations for us that we might have great gifts and that what we do with them would really make a lot of people happy with their gifts.

There is this passage of scripture that says: God never changes his mind about the people he calls and the things he gives them. God not only gives you gifts; he says: you are my special friend. Do you have some special friends? A lot of friends...friends are there to celebrate, they are there in our tough times, they are there just to be there every day when we need them, right? God wants to be that for us. He wants to be our friends. And He gives us these gifts and says: I have something special for you.

I liked it when I was in school and teachers would say: would you come up and clean the blackboard? Now, that's when we used things called chalk and most of you probably don't know what that is today, but when teachers and friends call you and say: would you help me make cookies or would you help me around the house it's nice to do things with friends, or at least I've always thought that was a lot of fun. So of all the things that God wants us to know it's that we are loved. Do you know that? A lot of people love you...not only your family, but friends and teachers and people that do things with you on the side, they really love you a great deal.

And so when we get these gifts, what are some gifts that you have that aren't really wrapped up in a box? Do you have any idea of some things you have, some special things that God gave you? Food...that's a good gift. Well, we have lots of them, we have lots of things but so many times we don't think about them.

When I was a young boy we sang a song about: Oh, be careful, little eyes, what you see. And little hands where you go and feet where you go and what you do with them. Eyes are a gift. What are things you see with your eyes? We see people, grass. I wish we could see some green grass soon; that would be nice, wouldn't it? Animals. We see a lot of very beautiful things. When I get awake and see a friend in the morning or when I see my mom because I don't see her week, it makes me happy. And you see friends you haven't seen in a while.

And then sometimes...do you ever see things with your eyes that aren't so happy? A messy

room...do you ever see that? Have any of you ever looked and seen dust in your house? See, sometimes we don't see everything nice. Sometimes if we look and we drive around, you'll see somebody and sometimes with your friends, they don't have as many clothes as we do. They don't have as much food. And maybe when I look at pictures of around the world and you see them I'm sure in school books, people live in deserts and there is no green grass.

So when we look around we can see some very sad things too. We can see sometimes people who are sick and sometimes people who are at trouble in school. Have you ever seen anyone in trouble? It's not a very nice thing to see, is it? We don't want to be on the other side of that.

So, our eyes have choices. We can look at good things and sometimes when I see that bad things I think: how can I make things better?

We have ears. What are things you hear? I just heard some beautiful music. Do you like your music? No? Well, not everybody likes music. That's okay. We all like different things. Do you like to hear the voice of the people you love, Mom or Dad or aunts or grandmas calling you? Sometimes that's a nice thing. Sometimes we hear the voice of our puppies or our kittens or some pet that we have, but there are sometimes there are other things we hear too. Sometimes there are words we shouldn't hear, right, because we shouldn't say them either. Sometimes when we hear the pain of someone crying it means someone is going through a tough time, right? There are a lot of things that we hear in the world and as adults we hear things too that aren't always so good.

And then there are the hands that are our gifts to do things with.

And then there are the feet that take us all kinds of places and enable us to do things. They enable us to run and to go.

There is a part of us in our mind, mind is a gift, it really is. And it helps us ask questions. When we are young we have a lot of questions like why is the sky blue. Or why can't I fly? Boy I wish I could fly. Or all kinds of things because that's how we learn.

So, the gift of our sight and our hearing and speech and smell and our mind, they are all great things, but they are really not just for us. Everything God gives us is also a gift back to God. He says: I want you to use whatever you have to bring glory to me. And so there are a lot of times we have to ask this question: who am I? Have you ever thought that? You are pretty young, but have you ever thought: what do I want to do when I become an adult? I used to think that a lot when I was a young man. And it changes through the years.

I'm an explorer. Do you know what a magnifying glass is? And you like to look at things like in this photo here, because I think a lot of life is a mystery. When I was young and I would see a leaf fall off a tree, I wanted to see all those little veins in it and if I'd find an in-

teresting rock with a lot of colors, I'd like to see it. I always liked to explore things and sometimes not just build, but sometimes tear things apart and see what makes them work. It was kind of an interesting thing for me, like when I got into school and you learned about Egypt and the pyramids that were built thousands of years ago. So, part of our mind can ask questions and begin to learn.

When I was a young boy, my father started working with me to do things like hold the tape and so I learned through the years how to measure things. And later he would help me build things and later on he helped teach me how to make bricks and to do the brick laying and things like that.

And it's Scout Sunday. I'm an Eagle Scout. And I want to say of all the great things I have done in life, being a scout was one of the best because it taught me things like first aid and how to help other people and to be faithful to God and to be true to people, to be a leader of all things, because to become an Eagle you have to learn how to lead other young men and women to do things. And it's helped me in my adulthood to be a leader; it's helped me also when I've traveled in other places to learn how to help people because some of the places we go aren't always so easy. So learning skills like building fires and how to repair things and make things, it really comes in handy.

One time I played trumpet for about ten years and so learning music was another thing I tried and sometimes I've told you before I love to sing, but whatever gifts we have and yours are different than mine. God says: I want you to use your hands, your voice, your ears. I want to use your gifts to make the world a better place. Does that sound like a good thing to do? Yeah, and it's fun.

Now, I would like to think...have you ever seen many paths that straight? I've not seen many paths that straight. A lot of the paths are like this: they are crooked. They go up hills and down hills and around turns. So that path of life isn't always easy. You don't always know what it is that God wants you to do, but God is always there because God has a way for you to do what it is with the gifts that God has given you to make this world a better place. God will make a way when it seems there is no other way. He just reminds us that whatever gifts you have, whether it is doing something with your ears or your hands or your eyes or speaking with your mouth, each one of us, everybody in this house, has gifts and they aren't just for us. We learn that gift giving is a good thing, isn't it? So the gifts you have are to give back to God.

So, I hope as you go through the years you will keep finding new things that you can do to make this world a better place and know that God is on your side to help you use gifts to bring His kingdom here on earth, which is a very loving thing to do.

So, thank you for coming up today. You may all get one of these here if you like.

**Message:**

Valentine's week...relationships are wonderful, whether it is with a sweetheart you have, whether it is a coworker or a good friend or if you are in a new relationship, when you hear these words: Can we talk? Brrrr... Is there anything worse? At jobs, can we talk it means it is usually not: boy, I have a great promotion for you. And men don't always listen real clearly, I've heard that. And so when you hear that: can we talk? it's like: Oh, Lord, what did I do now?

This is Peter today. Jesus is basically saying: Can we talk? Peter wasn't heard and Peter needed to unburden himself because he had denied Jesus and Jesus didn't forget it, not because he wanted to cast it on Peter, that would have been negative and that's not who Jesus was. It's because he saw it holding Peter back. Peter was wearing the load of guilt and of pain and suffering because he had let his Lord and Master down.

I read a poem this week by a Mrs. Fletcher:

Land of Beginning Again:

I wish there was a wonderful place called The Land of Beginning Again, where all our mistakes and all our heartaches could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door and never to be on again.

Would you like a place, a wonderful place, called A Land of Beginning Again? Wow! Wouldn't that be nice? The junk that I've had in my past, the disappointments and failures in school, the disappointments and failures in relationships with family and friends and the things that you thought you would do and you couldn't do and there are mornings you wake up and...does it happen to you? You remember stuff you did years ago and it still once in a while flashes because sometimes what we did years ago affects today.

But a land of starting again, and you know what? How many of you would really like that? You are in the right place! You are in the right place! We sing a song in our hymnal: This is a day of new beginnings, time to remember and move on. Remember? Time to believe what love is bringing, laying to rest the pain that's gone. We have a problem in this place. You keep picking it up again. All that garbage that God says you are forgiven: I cast your sins as far as the east is from the west. But tomorrow morning you come to God saying: I want to talk to you about what I did the other year and God says: about what, because I remember them no more.

But you see, you and I keep picking them up and our friends and family are so helpful, don't they do that too. Right? And God says: I want you to let go of these things so you can finally live because when you hold on to all that junk you can't live now and it holds you back from all you can be, all you can be for God.

And that was what was happening with Peter. We heard the run up to story last week with Pastor Bob and I'm just going to continue it. There was a time when Peter was known as Simon and he was one of these guys, a little full of himself, and Jesus before he was crucified, told the disciples that they gathered, remember this story? The time has come for my departure. It is growing near and I will be arrested, right? He tells the disciples this. No one wanted to be a part of that. I'm going to be arrested and I will be taken before the people and I will be crucified and everyone said: No, no, no Lord, we won't let it happen and he said: you all will deny me. And this Simon named Peter said: Oh, Lord, they might do it but it will never happen to me. I will be here for you. And remember what Jesus predicted? You will deny me three times before the rooster crows.

Now, when I was little around farms, you could hear the cock-a-doodle-do. You don't hear a lot of that here in Harrisburg anymore, but when I travel to poor countries, every little neighborhood has roosters because everybody has chickens. And my guess is, every time from that point on when Peter denied Jesus, every time he heard that he heard this: guilty. Do you have things that remind you? Guilty. You are a loser. You didn't do what you said. You are finished. And Jesus didn't want Peter to go down that way because what it did is like the Thomas the Doubter, it left him feel like a complete failure. I have felt that a few times in my life. And you have too. It's not a good feeling and Jesus doesn't want us to dwell on those things. We need to be humble enough to know that when we've made mistakes we need to say I'm sorry if it's fitting and we also need to say: you know what? This is only one failure, like Edison and like all those other geniuses of time, I need to figure out what went wrong. I need to improve it. I need to get better and I need to turn my failure into success. Don't stay in the back because it lets us with headaches and stomachaches and torn relationships because of something we can't undo. But we can certainly take care.

Peter had withdrawn himself from everyone, I'm sure. He was feeling like a failure. He was on that road that goes up and down and twists and turns and saying: what will I do with myself? What will I do with myself? I thought I was going to be a disciple of the God most high and it just hasn't worked. And Jesus was saying to him: that's a lie. Because not matter what our failures are, no matter what our disappointments are, no matter how many rejections we get the word from God the way Peter got that word.

What had happened was the men, they were discouraged when Jesus left. Remember the story, if you weren't here last week I want to review. The disciples were together and they were discouraged. They had been fishing all night, they couldn't get anything and Jesus shows up to them and he says: go throw your nets out one more time and the bottom line was their boats were so full of fish they didn't know what to do. Jesus wanted to let these men know they weren't going back to fishing for fish, they were going to be fishers of people. They were going to be those who would lead others into a saving relationship with God like you and I. So he asked Peter this evening: Do you love me? Peter's probably saying: well, Lord, you know that. Why in the world? But Peter was reminded of his denial. He was reminded of the pain.

One of the Gospels, only one of them said that night of the denial when Jesus looked over at Peter after the rooster crowed, he looked Peter in the eyes...it's swelling up with tears in my eyes as I think of that. It's bad enough to fail someone but right when you've promised: I'll be there for you, I'll take you to the hospital and you forget. I'll do this for you and you forget. I'll show up for lunch and you forget, I'll do something that is really meaningful and I forget and then you see them, oh you feel pretty low, don't you? And Peter was about as low as he could get and Jesus wanted to say to Peter: I'm not going to have this anymore.

When I was young I got punched in the eye one time accidentally. I walked behind my father who was starting a lawn mower and his elbow hit me in the eye and my eye swelled up and I couldn't even see my eye. And the pain was really great. And then the doctors said that they had to lance this and I didn't want a knife, and all this. I didn't know much but I knew as a kid I didn't want anyone touching it. And they numbed it and as soon as he lanced it and all that, you know, yuck came out of it, boy did it feel good.

When we have unconfessed sin like Peter, that's what it is. Peter wasn't much at that point. He had given up. He was ready to go back to fishing with some of the others. Jesus won't allow that in our life. There's a reason why we confess our sins. There's a reason. Jesus has something for us to do and if you are carrying the burdens of the past and I don't know how many times through the years I've heard: well, I can't do anything because I've failed... like the rest of us haven't? I've made a mistake...like the rest of us haven't? I'm not good enough...like the rest of us are?

This place, called the Body of Christ, not this building, this place, this building of people, we are all problematic folks. We are sinners. We are filled with human error. We have all kinds of issues and on the other side of that, we are the greatest gift the world has ever seen. You are the greatest gift the world has ever seen. Do you hear that? You are the greatest gift the world has ever seen to make something happen for the kingdom and so God, through Jesus Christ, said to Peter: Have I a place for you? I have a place for you. I will accept you. I will use you for the building of my kingdom.

And you need to hear that today, no matter what you have done, no matter where you have been. There was a song by Don Francisco years ago that said I don't care where you have been sleeping, I don't even care who has made your bed. I already gave my life to set you free. It doesn't matter what's in your past. Jesus says: Today, you are mine and I am yours. Peter, who was Simon, became this new man. He was a fisherman who became an evangelist. He was this wavering person who became known as the Rock. He was the person whose life was useless who became a person who was a life changer. Remember at the tomb, at the resurrection, everyone else was filled with doubt and when the word came to him, he ran to the tomb, not in fear. He ran as a bold rock that he was.

Jesus is looking for you and me to be a rock, to be strong, to be something for the world

around us. We need to take responsibility in our lives and when we've made errors and mistakes it's called sin, we need to confess it, we need to move on. We need to surrender all. Of all the things that are most difficult for us to do, that's the word. If it doesn't happen with husbands and wives and their relationships, it doesn't happen in our partners, in our friendships, if we don't give all ourselves to them, they will know it. And it's the same with our God. God doesn't want a part of you. He doesn't want a couple of hours on Sunday. God wants complete, total absolute surrender that we would listen, that we would go with our hands and our feet that we totally belong to Almighty God. God won't settle for anything less and you will never be at peace until you give God all that you are and all that you have.

What is the question for you every day like I asked the children? Why am I here? We get stuck in this world and this country I think probably more than any, of thinking our life is our own. Just to find a good career, a good job, to do what we sometimes not even like, I've heard people say I just want it for the money. Now that's not a good place to be. You can be unhappy for the next thirty years making good money. You need to find out where is it that God wants me. And what is it that I can do with my life at any age, young or old, because it will change and it will be modified. But in our abundance, we think only of self.

When I was writing this I started thinking of abundance because again I've just come back from a place where there isn't a lot of abundance. Those of us under sixty...that used to be me...I go to 62, are fairly spoiled. I have never, never in my life known want. Some of you who went through the depression and a few years after that knew a little bit about that. I've always had more than sufficient food. In Africa I am always asked: why are you people so fat over there? Well, we have lots of food and we take advantage of it. And yet in the same time we waste more food that probably any nation of the world. We have comfortable homes, comfortable houses, reliable transportation, the list is pretty amazing what we have and again we think it is for us. No, it's not for us. It's for God's glory. You see, when I surrender myself, my home, my car, my food, everything I have it's: Lord, what can I do with all that you have given me? It's not the fruit of my labor. That's a part of it. I'm not saying that your work and your efforts and your training isn't a part of your efforts, but you know what? Thanks be to God we have a privilege to even do that. There are people who have the genius, but they live in places controlled by those who aren't godly and they can never use their gifts for God's glory.

We have a brief time, now you might not think that. Time is limited. Most of us won't go beyond 100, right? Most of us. So, knowing that time is temporal and knowing that God wants us, what is it that God wants from you and what is it that you offer to Almighty God? God is saying to us all the time: Can we talk? And it's not because God wants to make us feel bad. God wants to lift us up. God wants...is there any time that you feel better than when you are helping somebody else? I doubt it. When we use our gifts to teach, to mentor someone who is younger or even someone who is older that needs something, we feel better about self. And so when we listen to God and if we do take that time in prayer and in study of God's Word, we will begin to hear what it is that God wants from us and we will be able to

hear those words: Do you love me? And we will respond: Yes, Lord, you know I love you. You know I love you. And there can be no excuses.

In every place I've ever served, I'll meet those folks and I'll ask: Can I invite you to come? I can't come to church. I've done some things I just don't feel good enough. If we are going to judge today who's good enough, I'd say all of us will get off this stage pretty quickly. I'm never good enough to be up here. You don't know all the things I've done in my life and said in my life and thought in my life. We are not worthy, but by God's grace he says: You are forgiven. You are forgiven. Who? You. You are forgiven. And today's a day you will live for me.

We hear these words often. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Why? Because God wants to set us free. You are loved. You are called. You are gifted. You are equipped. And now hear the big one: You are sent. If you have all you need, you are loved, you are called, you are equipped, you are gifted, we forget the last part: you are sent. For every young scout here this morning, God has something big for you. You have to discover what it where it is that God wants to use you to change and transform this world of which we are a part. God says: Come and follow me. And come and follow...that can mean a lot. That's a trusting thing firstly. You are trusting God and God is trusting that if you come and follow I've got something. It's a challenge to follow God. It's a challenge to come to the hand of Almighty God and say: You walk with me and I'll walk beside you every day of your life. It's one of the grandest invitations you'll ever have. The ultimate invitation: come! Be a part of this family, be a part of this kingdom.

This story we hear about Simon turned Peter the Rock was a man with a new day. It started with a man who was down and out and thought he was finished and he turned into the Rock, the man who was willing to go into the world, the man who was doing great things. Peter is not the star of this story. The real hero is Jesus and he's our hero today. He's the one who says no matter where you have been or what you have done, and I remind you the people around you will remember our mistakes. I'm sure there are people in my hometown who probably still say: I can't believe he's a preacher. Do you know what he did? Do you know what said? And you have people...they are people who unfortunately have done things and have been caught more than all of us. They spent time in jail. And we need to be the kind of people who are willing to give second chances because a lot of other folks could have been arrested through the years, right? We need to give people second chances who have hurt us, who have crushed us in relationships. When I see the wickedness sometimes in divorces and I'm thinking: do we not realize we are imperfect and it is not always going to work? Can we not forgive? Yes, it is painful, yes, it's hurtful, but can we not choose a higher road rather than the ripping and tearing into everyone around us?

We need to talk! We are witnesses of the Most High God. We need to love, we need to respect one another, we need to lift up, we need to encourage. Yes, and when we sin we can

lovingly return into one another and talk to them about how we've hurt one another. Yes, it's fine, honest! But it's not attacking, it is in love: you know what? You've really hurt me bad. We really need to do something about this.

So, when I hear this: Can we talk? it's good news. He wants to lance the boil of whatever it is in our life that sets us free from the pain and the suffering and all those things because God wants to set us free to be the children of God we can be. We, you and I, are life-changers in world that needs life-changers? Amen? (Amen.) Amen. Thanks be to God.