

## Sermon Notes for April 28

Matthew 28:16-20 “Let’s Make a Deal”

Brené Brown is a research professor at the University of Houston. She has written books about grief and about relationships and about vulnerability. Her latest book is entitled, *Dare to Lead. Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts*. What I find most interesting is that she writes from a secular standpoint - and yet, she has to quote spiritual giants - because almost all of her research *to Spiritual Formation*.

Let’s begin with her quoting C. S. Lewis: “To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.”

If you want to never be hurt - then you can’t be vulnerable. If you are not vulnerable - then you will never love. The followers of Jesus have had their hearts and lives shattered when their friend, their teacher, their healer, their miracle-worker, their non-anxious, non-judgmental lover of their souls, has been brutally executed with massive public humiliation and buried. Now Jesus is back!

Matthew 28:16-20 (Voice)

The eleven disciples, *having spoken to the Marys*, headed to Galilee, to the mountain where they were to meet Jesus. [There are scholars that have some guesses as to which particular

mountain - but rather than get thrown into an argument over specifics, I choose to think of mountains - especially in the Hebrew Testament - as a place where God reveals the nature of God.] When the disciples saw Jesus there, many of them fell down and worshiped, *as Mary and the other Mary had done*. But a few hung back. They were not sure (*and who can blame them?*). [I don't blame them. I used to go to a church that thought all doubt was the opposite of faith. You were not supposed to question anything. I don't think that is healthy or even human. Look at Job; look at Lamentations; look at the Psalms; you have folks questioning and going up against God and God isn't smiting them with lightning bolts. Perhaps God has a greater tolerance for doubt than many churches!] Jesus came forward and addressed *His beloved disciples*.

**Jesus:** I am here speaking with all the authority of God, *who has commanded Me to give you this commission*: [remember how folks were amazed at the authority which we he preached and taught? - here it is again!] Go out and make disciples in all the nations. Ceremonially wash them through baptism in the name of the *triune God*: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then disciple them. *Form them in the practices and postures that I have taught you*, and show them how to follow the commands I have laid down for you. [Go and make disciples – But. There are two parts. One is baptism - so we are to go and make NEW disciples. Two is to 'teach and show' - so we are to go and make DEEPER disciples.

This is where things get interesting - because I think churches, generally, in the past, have made two BIG mistakes with this passage.

1. Jesus is NOT a commodity - we can't and shouldn't *sell Jesus like a side of beef!*

## 2. People are NOT projects - as something *to be fixed!*

Do you like people chasing you through a parking lot trying to sell you something? Or worse, how enjoyable is it that someone on your front porch is telling you that your core values are all wrong and you have to change immediately and completely?

Jesus became our Lord and Savior because of relationship, not a transaction. We grew in our obedience to Jesus because of our growing trust.

Brené Brown's daughter, Ellen, had a third-grade teacher with a "marble jar." If the class did something honorable and noteworthy, a marble or two went in. If the class did something dangerous or stupid, marbles came out. Ellen told her mom that she had two special "full marble jar friends." One talked about Ellen's Oma and Opa - and Momma Bear Brené Brown wanted to know why small talk about grandparents was so important?

"Well, not everyone has eight grandparents." "I think it's really cool that Hanna remembers all of their names."

She continued, "Well, Lorna is also my marble jar friend because she will do the half-butt sit with me." My very understandable response: "Lord have mercy, what is that?" "If I come in too late to the cafeteria and all the tables are full, she'll scoot over and just take half the seat and give me the other half of the seat so I can sit at the friend table."

So now Brené Brown lectures: "It turns out that trust is in fact earned in the smallest of moments. It is earned not through heroic

deeds, or even highly visible actions, but through paying attention, listening, and gestures of genuine care and connection.”

Finally, Jesus, named Emmanuel, meaning “God with us” says:

And I will be with you, day after day, to the end of the age.

THIS IS THE WORD OF GOD FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

**THANKS BE TO GOD! Amen**

PLEASE, let’s make a deal that we won’t put on a pious face and fancy clothes and go out and sell Jesus to “*those people!*”

Let me tell you a condensed story from Alyce McKenzie, who does a fine job of teaching folks how to preach:

“A pastor in Houston owned a lake house on Lake Livingston in East Texas. The house was located in a wooded area with only two other dwellings nearby. His neighbor to the left was an atheist. His neighbor to the right self-identified as a lapsed Catholic. He was trying to sell this property.

One night, watching the news, he saw a tornado that looked like it touched down around his lake house. The next morning, he grabbed his chainsaw and drove to see the damage.

Before he got to his house, there were pine trees sticking out the roof of the atheist's house, like it had been pole axed. The mobile home occupied by the lapsed Catholic had been dissected by a huge pine tree that had fallen through the roof.

At his place? No fallen trees. No broken windows. No smashed roof. No damage at all. As he stood in front of his house shaking his head, his two neighbors approached him, as a team of two.

He says that having the chain saw at that moment was a good thing.

Here are the things he did not say: 1. God has seen fit to spare me. 2. United Methodism is more pleasing to God than either atheism or Catholicism.

Instead, he said, "I can't explain this. But I have a chain saw and I am happy to help you with cleaning up your damage."

Make a BIG DEAL of being vulnerable and building trust in your relationships.

**AND THAT'S THE MESSAGE!**