

McCabe United Methodist Church  
“Just Little Grains of Sand”  
Pastor Art Scanson  
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Matthew 25:31-40

There is always someone out to prove they can do something different. You heard about the man who walked backward across the United States, from California to New York.

When he reached New York someone asked him, “What was the hardest part of your trip? What was the single most difficult thing? Was it the desert, or the mountains, or the rivers?”

“No,” the man said. “It was the sand in my shoes!”

Most of us can give meaning to that statement as we live in this hectic, overdriven world in which we live. In today’s world we seem to be threatened more by a multitude of little strains than by the occasional and spectacular big ones. The truth is that most of us can manage the major emergencies of life quite well. The great trials – sorrow, tragedy, hardship, and bereavement – we handle with some sense of poise and strength, only to be worn down by the little things. When a crisis comes, how admirably we rise to the occasion! While we are more likely to be taken down and torn apart by the “sand in our shoes” those little grains of sand!

A man went to see his pastor to talk about the major emergencies and crises in his life. It seemed the young man had had his share and then some. Within a few years time, his parents had been killed in a car wreck, his daughter had suffered a prolonged illness, his wife had emotional problems, and his house had burned. You talk about Job of the Old Testament.

What was interesting is that this young man had been a tower of strength through all of these problems. He had been an inspiration to everyone in the community. But it was the morning he went to see his pastor, he was a wreck. He was depleted, depressed, devastated. Why? That morning his boss had pointed out that his sales were a little behind last year’s. It crushed him! He had withstood all those big tragedies, but that small critique, that brief comment, that little thing had ripped him apart! Isn’t that what so often happens to us?

Let me ask.

-What destroys marriages? Little things!

-What alienates families? Little things!

-What is the difference between success and failure, victory and defeat? Little things!

-What cripples a church more than any other factor? Little things!

If you see a person, a marriage, a family, a business, a church, a community limping along, you can count on it—the problem is most likely those little grains of sand in the shoes.

This brings us to our scripture lesson where Jesus recognizes the importance of little things, and he tells a story to make the point. He put his parable in the setting of the Great Judgement. Some of the people were on the right and some on the left. Some received a great blessing, while the others missed out. Why? The distance between them was really not so great, but their destinies were poles apart.

Listen to the parable. Read Matthew 25:31-40.

Jesus explained that the difference in destinies was caused by little things—a sandwich to a hungry man, clothes to a needy person, a cup of water to one who is thirsty, a kindness to a stranger, a visit to someone sick or in prison. That was all—just little things. Yet these little

things, and the way we handle them or mishandle them, makes all the difference.

Think back to the person who is your all-time favorite Sunday School teacher or school teacher. What was it that made them so important? They probably were not the ones who taught you the most but rather the one who paid attention to the little things in your life. They noticed and affirmed the things about you that others missed.

Today we have recognized and dedicated the Church School staff for this next year. They have volunteered to share themselves with others, from the youngest to the oldest, of our church family who participate in Church School. Also, we recognized our third graders by giving each of them a Bible. At a time when they can now read for themselves. How many of us here have that special Bible given to us in the third grade or some other time? It isn't the Bible, it is the recognition we got that is important!

Again today there is a chance for each of us to look at the tables in the Gathering Space and Great Hall – places where we can sign up to do the little things that will make a difference in McCabe's ministry to others. For example, how many of you have taken advantage of our prayer ministry and spent time in our prayer chapel. If you take one of the notebooks as you enter - you will find on the first page a poem or the words to a hymn. After that there are a list of prayer needs for individuals as well as our ministries. You don't have to be an expert, or experienced at prayer to pray. Just read the requests and after each one, just lift them up to God, saying "Lord help this person." Or, "O God, please be a part of this person/family by the work of your Holy Spirit." There a lot of little ways that each of us can be involved. Take a look at those places where you can give a little time to make a big difference in someone else's life.

Some years ago, a doctor in New York said that our country's three major killers are not heart disease, cancer, and accidents, but rather, calendars, telephones, and clocks—the tyranny of an accelerated life. Is it any wonder that there is an office building in Detroit nicknamed "Ulcer Alley?" My friends, Jesus' words are here to remind us that we are being attacked by pressures that keep us from doing the little things of ministry in Jesus' name.

I am reminded of this with the "three miles of love." In the first mile, we love the lovable, those who love us back. In the second mile, we love the unlovable, those who don't love us back. In the third mile (the most difficult), we love those who outdo us, those who succeed where we fail, those who are more fortunate than we, those who got the job we wanted—that is the love of the saints!

To do the best ministry we can do: (1) we need to travel light. That is, decide what is really important to each of us and give our energies to those things. This includes the little things that make a difference. (2) Relax your soul in God. Jesus' parable of the sower speaks to this. The idea is to sow the seed the best you can and trust God to bring the harvest. It doesn't matter if the odds are against you. It doesn't matter that things sometimes seem hopeless. It doesn't matter how bleak the outlook. Don't worry about it. Just sow the seed and leave the rest to God.

My friends, out there in the halls are many opportunities for each of us to sow the seeds of kindness, love and compassion. Let's not let the sand in our shoes keep us from serving God faithfully in these days!