

June 24, 2012 - This I know: There is One Thing

We are continuing our series that we began last week entitled “This I know” and we’re trying, for the next few weeks to go over some things that God tells us “These are things that you can know; that you can hang on to; that you can count on, no matter what else happens, these things you can know.

I have referenced this movie before, so I apologize, but in the movie “What about Bob” we are introduced to a character, in one of the other scenes we meet Bob Wylie. Bob is suffering from nearly every phobia and neurosis known to mankind. In one of the early scenes is his first meeting with his latest in a long line of psychiatrists, Dr. Leo Marvin. Now, during the interview Dr. Marvin asked the very strange Bob about his now estranged wife and Bob explains, “There are two types of people in this World. Those who like Neil Diamond and those who do not. My wife loves him.” And Bob says “That is kind of the basis for how we divide up the World, those who love Neil Diamond and those who do not.” Now I think Bob was on to something. I think there are two types of people in this World. I’m not sure it has anything to do with Neil Diamond, but this morning we’re going to look at one of the ways to divide them. I’m sure there are many criteria by which we could use to divide up the two types of people there are in this World. This morning, we’re going to look at one set of those in particular.

This morning, I’m going to suggest to you that there are two types of people in this World. There are those who are practical and then, there are those who are passionate. Now practical people are governed by logic and reason and pragmatics. They are driven to find solutions and to find answers, and to find truth. They are ‘fixers’. That is who the practical people are.

The passionate people, on the other hand, they are governed by things like emotions and connections and intuition. They are driven to find relationships and meaning and experience. They are the feelers.

And so, we are left with these two groups. The fixers and the feelers. Now, some of us, probably many of us, are a little bit of both of those two things. There’s probably very few people who are all of one and none of the other. So most of us are probably a little bit of both of those, but I would guess that most of us are predominantly one over the other. You probably know which one of those two you are and if you don’t know, ask your spouse or close friend. They probably know fairly well which one of those two things you typically are. Now, just to give some tangible examples here, generally speaking, and there probably exceptions to that, so I’ll preface that, but generally speaking men tend to be fixers and women tend to be feelers. That’s why we run into situations like this, where you have a couple, let’s just say for arguments sake that they are a married couple and a husband comes home and his wife is visibly upset and she begins to pour out all the gory details of what seems, at least to her, a completely disastrous situation. Now being the loving husband you are you very quickly analyse the situations and devise what is, if you say so yourself, a brilliant

solution to all of her woes. When your wife eventually takes a breath you excitedly share your helpful idea with her but instead of gratitude and jubilation that you anticipate, your wife responds with something else altogether. Well, husbands be patient with your wife, it's not that she's totally lost it, it's just, she's a feeler.

Now, wives. Something terribly upsetting has happened to you so you turn to your husband for comfort and support. You begin pouring out your heart to him but after you have barely scratched the surface of what is so troubling about this situation, he interrupts you to throw out some overly simplistic cure-all that he has just whipped up. He clearly has no sense of how deeply this situation is effecting you and how intense your feeling about the circumstance and the people involved are. Now wives, cut your husband some slack. It's not that he doesn't care, it's just that he's probably a fixer.

Now, the other example that comes to mind is the difference between parents and children. Parents tend to be, especially when they are dealing with their children, they tend to be fixers. Whereas children, and particularly teenagers, tend to lean more to the feeler side. So take this example. Parents, your child comes to you and wants to attend a particular event with their friends. You objectively assess the situation and decide that for whatever reason, perhaps their grades have been slipping lately or perhaps you think that we need to spend more family time together or maybe, there is another activity at the same time that you think would be more beneficial for your child to attend. But for whatever completely valid reason, you inform your child that they may not attend the desired event. Besides there will be other opportunities down the road like this and in the grand scheme of things, this is not that big of a deal. However, instead of thanking you for wisely looking out for their best interests, they completely fly off the handle and start ranting about, well you're not sure about what, but then they stomp off to their room as if you had just sentenced them to a lifetime of hard labour on a deserted island. Now parents, be patient with your kids, remember that especially in adolescence, they have emotional red bull coursing through veins and it's not that they have lost all sense of reason or wisdom, it's just, they're feelers.

Now too, you teenagers out there, so like when your friends invite you to a party or whatever, and it's going to be like the totally biggest event of the year and you know everyone who is anyone is going to be there and so you ask your parents, can you please, please go, but for some totally lame and arbitrary reason, they say 'no' and you're just about to completely lose it because they just can't see how going to this thing absolutely means the entire world to you and you'd give up just about anything if it meant getting to go there. They are clearly clueless about how important it is to you and the social standing you will get if you go, or how miserable your life is going to be if you miss this one event. Now kids, cut your parents some slack. Trust that they are really doing what they believe is the right thing and the best thing for you. It's not that they are just total freaks and have no idea what it is like to be a kid, it's just that they are fixers.

One other observation I have made about fixers and feelers, is that, as I look at the World

around me, I see that generally speaking the generations that came before me as I look at those people who are, let's say 50 and over, generally speaking as a groups, they tend to be fixers. And as I look the other direction and I look at generations coming after me and I look at the people who are let's say, 30 and under, I find that as a group, generally speaking, they tend to be the feelers in our society. Now I'm not really sure if that's specific to those generations like the boomers and the busters are fixers and the gen-exers and the ones who come after, are feelers, or maybe that's just the product of the stage of life that you are in. As you get into those later years you kind of shift from feeler to fixer. I'm not sure what it is but somehow generally speaking, those who are over 50 are the practical pragmatic realistic ones, and those who are under 30 are the more passionate emotion-driven dreamers, among us.

Now, you may ask, why have we spent all of this time examining the difference between the fixers and the feelers, well because there are three main characters in our text this morning. One of them is Jesus and of the other two, one is practical, the other is passionate. One is a fixer, and the other is a feeler. Those traits have significant impact on what happens in our story. Let's recap the story that Dave read for us earlier out of Luke, Chapter 10, starting in verse 38:

“Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem. They came to a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed them into her home. Her sister Mary sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he taught, but Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said ‘Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits there while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me.’ But the Lord said to her ‘Dear Martha, you are worried and upset over these details. There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it and it will not be taken away from her.’

You see, Mary was a feeler. She sat at Jesus' feet. She listened to his words. She bonded and made connections and built relationships. Martha on the other hand, was a fixer. There were things that needed to be attended to so she prepared the meal, setting the table. Tidying up. After all, when the great Rabi comes to your house you can't just nuke a burrito and say 'here you go' there are things that need to be done. At first glance at this story, it may seem that Jesus condones the passionate and rejects the practical. That somehow he is saying that feelers are more godly than the fixers. I'm pretty sure I may have even heard sermons to that effect somewhere along the way. But that's really not a fair reading of this text. You see, Jesus isn't really suggesting that everyone should just sit around and no one should ever get up and do anything. There are people who have tried that before. In Greece there is a place called Mediora. It is known because it has these really weird rock structures all around. But what's significant about the rocks more than just their funny shape, is that, on the top of many of them they have these little monasteries. There was at one time up to fifteen of these little monasteries built on the top of these rocks which are almost inaccessible. Now today, you can see this is one of the lucky ones it has a rope bridge going across from one walk to the other. If you're not quite so lucky you can go across in the zip line which some of you might actually think is lucky but most of us would probably lean against that. Back in the olden days they

didn't have the zip line so if you wanted to get to the monastery they would lower down a basket on a rope and you would get in and trust the monks at the top to reel you all the way up to the top. When we were there our guide told us he asked one of the monks one time, he said the monks were very frugal and they did not want to waste the rope and so they never threw the rope out until it wore out. So he asked them "how do you know when the rope wears out?" They said "Well, when it breaks, then it's worn out, then you get a new one." So, thankfully, the one I went to had stairs and we didn't have to take that approach. These monks like to live in isolation away from everyone else so they can just sit and be alone. But the monks in the monasteries weren't the first ones to try this in Mediora. Mediora, those rocks that you saw, they're pitted with all of these caves to long before the monasteries came along, hermit monks came along and they would go up and they would go up and crawl into one of these caves and they would live in that cave with no shelter and no food unless someone lowered it down in a basket from above, and all they would do is sit in there and think about God. And to them, that was the pinnacle of spirituality. Well, that's not what Jesus is trying to allude to us by the story of Mary and Martha. He's not saying "Here's what you need to do. Forget about doing anything and just find a nice little cave and sit there and read your bible all day." That's not the point Jesus is trying to make. Now, what he is trying to say to Martha is, "The point is this: I'm not here for very long and what's coming out of my mouth right now is far more important than what's going to go into my mouth. So, instead of fixing supper, let's work on fixing your broken life. Instead of cleaning up the house, let's clean up your heart. Instead of washing dishes, let's talk about washing away the sin in your life." In fact, Jesus doesn't reject Martha's practical nature, he appeals to it. He says "Martha, you're a practical person. You are looking for solutions and answers. You are looking to fix things and make things right. And that's great, but you're looking in the wrong place. Mary is looking in the right place. Not because she's a feeler, but because she's looking to me." Fixers are the people who are seeking truth and Jesus will tell his disciples later on in John 14:6: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me." So you see, no matter what kind of person you are, if you are a fixer or a feeler, whether you're practical or passionate, you will find what you're seeking by looking to Jesus. Mary was a feeler, Martha was a fixer and Jesus loved them both deeply for who they were and we'll see that in our next story.

For that we have to jump to John, Chapter 11:1-5: This is a story you may have read before, may have heard before, but this morning we'd like to take a little different look at it, a little different angle and hopefully, see something new that will be helpful to us in our walk.

"Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister, Martha. Mary whose brother Lazarus now lay sick was the same one who would pour out perfume on the Lord and wipe his feet with her hair. So the sister sent word to Jesus 'Lord, the one you love is sick.' And when he heard this Jesus said 'This sickness will not end in death. No it is for God's glory so that God's son may be glorified through it.' Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus."

Now, just imagine for a moment if you would. If I were sick and I could send one of you directly to Jesus to say "Jesus, Mike Parker is sick, he's very sick and he needs your help."

Now, it's a pretty cool thought that Jesus would say "Oh yes! Mike Parker, he's a good chap. Let's see if we can help him." But in this story, what really blows my mind to imagine that the message could be as simple as 'the one you love is sick'. They don't have to mention Lazarus by name. Just imagine that we could go to Jesus and say 'The one you love is sick' and in no uncertainty about who we were talking about. And the truth is, I could pray that way for any one of you this morning. I could say 'Lord, the one you love is sick', 'Lord the one you love is stressed', 'Lord the one you love, their marriage is falling apart', 'Lord, the one you love is worried about their kids.' 'Lord the one you love is having money trouble' and Jesus would know exactly who I was talking about and would be equally concerned for you as he was for Lazarus, Mary and Martha. And that is just a profound thought to me. The story continues:

"And when he heard that Lazarus was sick he stayed for two more days. Then he said to his disciple, 'Let us go back to Judea.' But Rabi, they said 'A short while ago the Jews tried to stone you and yet you are going back there?' Jesus answered 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? The man who walks by day will not stumble for he sees by this World's light. It is when he walks by the night that he will stumble for he has no light.'"

Now, at first Jesus doesn't go to see Lazarus but don't misconstrue that for a lack of caring. It's just that he had a different plan. A couple of days later he comes to his disciple and says, okay guys, now it's time, we're going to Bethany. And the disciples protest a little bit. They say "Last time you were in Judea they tried to stone you. Bethany is only two miles away from Jerusalem" and John will tell us later on that there were a lot of Jews that came out of Jerusalem to console Mary and Martha including a number of Pharisees who were kind of Jesus' adversaries a lot of the time. The disciples as a group, tend to be fairly practical guys and they say "The last time you were there they tried to kill you so the practical thing to do is, not go back there."

It reminds me of Dave's philosophy with his kids. He tells me that lots of times when his kids do something that would injure themselves, not in a severe way but just kind of injure themselves like stub their toes or whatever, his response would be "Did it hurt?" "Yes". And he would say "Don't do it again". And that's what the disciples are saying here, they say 'Jesus the last time you went, they tried to stone you. Do you want to get stoned again?' 'No'. 'Well, don't go there again.' And so they are a little perplexed about what is going on and Jesus says "No, we need to go and here's why. Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep but I'm going there to wake him up." And the disciples say "Well Lord, if he sleeps he will get better." And Jesus had been speaking of death but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I'm glad you were not there so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Then Thomas, called Didymus, said to the rest of the disciples "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

At this point I'm sure the disciples are thoroughly confused. When Lazarus was sick and you could have done something about it, you didn't go. And now that Lazarus has died, you want to go. Now it may have been worth the risk to go down to Judea if it meant saving Lazarus, but why take the chance now that there is nothing to be done. Now as I've said, as a group the

disciples were fairly practical men but there were at least a few of them who leaned more to the passionate side. Who were more passion driven. Obviously Peter is the first one who comes to mind. Peter is always blurting things out and jumping out of boats and cutting off ears and making emphatic statements so, Peter clearly a passion-driven guy. But, I think Thomas might have been a feeler as well. Thomas is only identified by name a few times in the Gospels. The one everyone remembers is just after Jesus has been crucified, and some of the disciples have seen him risen but Thomas has not and try and tell Thomas that Jesus has risen from the dead and Thomas just can't believe it. He'd love to believe that Jesus is risen but it's just not something that logic and reason can convince him of. Thomas needs to see Jesus and touch him and reconnect with him in person, for the resurrection to be real. So Thomas says to the other disciples: John 20:25: "Unless I see the nail marks in his hand and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." And because of that, for the next two millennia, Thomas is known as 'Doubting Thomas'. But I think that's an unfair rap because here in John, Chapter 11, apparently all the rest of the disciples are hemming and hawing about the impracticality of walking into the mouth of the lion for no seemingly good reason and Thomas is the one who speaks up and declares "I'd rather go with him and die, than abandon him and live. Who is coming with me?" I think that's the Thomas we can remember. And so, the story continues from there as Jesus and his disciples go on.

"On arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem. Many Jews had come out to Mary and Martha to comfort them in the loss of their brother. Martha heard that Jesus was coming and went out to meet him, but Mary stayed home. 'Lord' Martha said to Jesus 'If you had been here my brother would not have died but I know that even now, God will give you whatever you ask.' Jesus said to her 'Your brother will rise again'. Martha answered 'I know he will rise again in the resurrection in the last day.' Jesus said to her 'I am the resurrection and the light. He who believes in me will live even though he dies and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' 'Yes Lord' she told him. 'I believe that you are the Christ the Son of God who was to come into the World.' And after she said this, she went back and called her sister aside. Martha comes rushing out to Jesus and she asks the question that everyone's been thinking. 'Why weren't you here?' 'If you had been here my brother would not have died.'

And what Martha is looking for is not so much answers, she wants to know, why? She wants to understand. She wants an explanation. She wants to know if Jesus can fix this situation and Jesus' responds to her on her own terms, and communicates to her in her own language. He says "You want to know what's going to happen? You want to be reassured of who I am? I am the resurrection and the light. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies and whoever believes in me will never die." And that is exactly what Martha needed to hear. I know it is exactly what Martha needed to hear because as soon as she said it, she took off and went to get her sister. Here's what happens next:

"After she said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. 'The teacher is here' she

said ‘and is asking for you’. When Mary heard this, she got up and ran quickly to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house comforting her noticed how quickly she got up, they followed her supposing that she was going to the tomb to mourn there. When Mary reached the place where Jesus was, she saw him and fell at his feet. She said “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her, also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. “Where have they laid him?” he asked. “Come and see Lord” they replied. And Jesus wept.”

Now, I always thought it was weird that Mary didn’t go out to meet Jesus the first time. The way John tells the story, it seems like the sisters were together, at least in close proximity to one another when news of Jesus’ arrival came. Surely Martha would have told Mary that she was going out to meet Jesus, so why didn’t Mary come along? I wonder if the answer might not be in the fact the Mary was a feeler. Martha was going out to get answers but Mary’s heart was broken. It was broken by the loss of her brother but it was also broken by the absence of the one who could have prevented the tragedy. So what does Jesus do? He asks for her. He calls for her. He invites her. And Mary suddenly realizes, he hasn’t abandoned us, he hasn’t turned his back on us, he has come for us. And so, Mary races out to Jesus and as she gets close enough to see him she gets overwhelmed by emotion and she collapses at his feet, sobbing. What’s interesting here is that Mary asked the very same question, word for word, that her sister did. “Lord if you would have been here, my brother would not have died.” In other words “where were you?” But Jesus’ response to Mary is completely different to his response to Martha. Jesus’ response to Mary on her own terms and communicates in her own language and the passage tells us: “Jesus wept”. Mary wasn’t looking for reasons or explanations, Mary needed to grieve with her dear friend. She needed to hug and to cry and to be told ‘it will be okay. You can get through this. I’m right here.’ So Jesus wept with her. He knew what was going to happen. He knew that there was really no need to mourn. He knew that in a few minutes everything was going to be better than okay. But he wept with Mary. And that is exactly what Mary needed. I know this because of the reaction of the people who were watching. Then some of the Jews, the passionate ones said “See how he loved him”. But then the practical ones said “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” Then Jesus, once more deeply moved, it was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. Now this phrase in Verse 38, and I was again back in Verse 33, that Jesus was “deeply moved”. The word used there literally means ‘to snort like a horse’ and it generally comes with connotations of anger with it, and so one commentator suggests if you’re looking for a word picture to describe this, imagine a bull fighter waving a red cloak. What does the bull usually do in response? Well, he snorts and he bellows and he paws at the dirt preparing to charge the fighter and the bull at that point in time has one thing clearly set in his mind and that is, tattooing that cape and perhaps the matador on the wall as hard as he possibly can. So the question is, in this scenario, when Jesus is deeply moved, who is it that he’s preparing to charge? Some have speculated maybe it’s Satan or the forces of evil or even, death itself. I mean after all, if this were a purely physical battle between two men, it

would not be unexpected for the bad guy to come along and to go after someone who is close to the hero, just to let him know, I can get to you. So perhaps, that's what's happening here between Jesus and Satan. Perhaps Jesus is just finely fed up with seeing all of the pain and the hurt that sin and evil has caused in what was once a perfect World. A World that he created. John begins his Gospel about Jesus by saying: "In the beginning was the Word (that's Jesus) and the Word was with God and the Word was God, he was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life and that life was the light of men, but now Jesus looks around and all He sees in his once perfect World, is pain and hurt and death.

Jesus may have also very well have known that what he was about to do would affectively be signing his own death warrant. As we skip to the end of the story, we see that there were some Pharisees who were there that reported back to the Chief Priests and as they discussed the events of the day, here is their conclusion. John 11:53-54:

"So from that day on, the Chief Priests and Pharisees plotted to take Jesus' life. Therefore, he could not longer move publicly among the Jews, he withdrew into the desert to a village called Ephraim where he stayed with his disciples."

This moment in time when Jesus is deeply moved and acts out, is the turning point of John's Gospel. This is the point of the movie where the hero has just been dealt a severe blow, slowly stands, dusts himself off, wipes off his chin and gives a stare across to his enemy that says 'That's it, you're going down.'

So now, the rest of the story. They go to the tomb. Jesus says to those there "Move the stone away from the tomb". Practical Martha says "It's been four days since they put him in there and there's going to be a smell." And Jesus replies: "Martha, trust me." And so they remove the stone and Jesus prays and he even mentions "I'm doing this so everyone will know where my powers coming from, that it's coming straight from God." And Jesus says in a loud voice "Lazarus come out!" and Lazarus walks out, still wrapped in the grave clothes and Jesus says "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." Jesus has just walked into enemy territory and brought back a POW and he's saying "Take off those grave clothes, let him go, remove those cuffs, release the shackles." And now you know why the Chief Priests and Pharisees were so anxious to get rid of him because he had just displayed the kind of power that, well, scared them to death. Now the incredible power that Jesus displayed, raising Lazarus from the dead, was indeed an incredible thing and we could very easily spend our whole lesson time just looking at that one incident. However, equally profound is the way that Jesus has interacted with Lazarus' sisters all the way through that story. He meets them both on their own terms. He speaks to them both in their own language. He connects to them in their own ways and that's incredibly important thing as well, because it means, that no matter who you are or what kind of personality you have, Jesus understands you. Jesus can relate to you. Jesus gets where you're coming from. He can connect with you and your life in meaningful ways.



Not only that, but as Christ's representatives in this World, we as individual Christians and collectively as the Church, are called to follow his example and to reach out to all kinds of people in all kinds of situations. To find ways to relate to people on their level and to speak to them in their own language. To connect with people in meaningful ways and communicate God's message in understandable terms. The Apostle Paul describes that process this way in 1Cor. 9:22-23 he says:

"I become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do this for the sake of the Gospel that I might share, and it's blessings."

Which means, on the one hand, we must be able to offer real answers to life's questions. We must be able to convey the truth of God's word as we understand it. We must be willing to have open and frank discussions about what we believe and why. We must be able to explain to people that sin separates people from God and it's the sacrifice of Christ that is the only thing that can remove sin and reunite people with God. We must be able to talk about Christian morals and ethics in a way that is neither compromising nor judgmental. We must seek to share the good news of Jesus in a way that will resonate with people's rational nature. And in many ways, I think at least historically especially over the last 200 years or so, this has actually been the Church's strong suit. If you think back to things like 'The Great Debates and the Big Revivals' those were all about conveying truth, to people. Much of what we've done and much of how we've done it has appealed to the rational and the logical and the practical. But if we only appeal to the rational nature of people, there is a large segment of society to which our message will fail to connect. Remember as we began this morning and we were talking about fixers and feelers and we said 'Generally speaking, the men are fixers and the women are feelers. Parents are fixers and teens are feelers. Over 50 are fixers and under 30 are feelers and therefore, if our message only appeals to one side of that equation we are missing a whole bunch of people. Which is why we must also listen intently to people as an example of the way that God listens to their heart. We must care for those in need as a model of the way that God cares for our needs. We must love people relentlessly as a reflection of God's unfailing love for them. We must sacrifice ourselves for the benefit of others because Christ sacrificed himself for us. We must draw close to people and invest in their lives, not to get something in return, but simply because they are valuable for who they are, because that's the way God sees them.

When it comes to feelers especially, nothing is more true than the old saying "They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." An example of that a story I came across in the last couple of weeks. Mother Theresa was asked to give the Commencement speech at Harvard way back in 1982. During her speech she spoke boldly about all sorts of things including abstinence. When she got to that some of the people in the audience began booing, which if you asked me is pretty gutsy to boo Mother Theresa as she's giving a speech, but that's what they were doing. As it turned out, some of the kids that she had rescued from the streets of Calcutta were in Boston and when they heard she was giving the speech at

Harvard they came down to surprise her. When they heard the boos, they misinterpreted that as the end of the speech and they all came rushing out onto the stage. When the kids came out onto the stage and the people saw the changed life of these kids that Mother Theresa had impacted, that's when the boos turned to a standing ovation. Now, what had changed. They had seen her love first hand and her care in action. They were touched by the impact she had had on these kids. They were moved by her selflessness and her sacrifice. Then and only then were they open to listening to the truth she was delivering.

As we go out from here this week, our challenge is to share God's truth in a way that will connect with our practical nature and to share God's heart in a way that will connect with their passionate nature. And to share to Good News of Jesus which is for everyone around us. Paul says in 1Cor. 9:19:

“Though I am free, I belong to no man so I make myself a servant to everyone to win as many as possible.”

Let us make that our goal this week as we go out.