



United Methodist Church OF GENEVA

What We Value: Open-minded

A fifth sermon in the series on UMCG Values by Pastor Rob Hamilton.

Delivered on February 05, 2023 on Matthew 15:22-28 NRSVUE

22 Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." 23 But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." 24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." 26 He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." 27 She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." 28 Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed from that moment.

Open-minded: At UMCG we value respectful dialogue.

WHAT WE VALUE January 8-February 12, 2023 SERMON SERIES We will spend six weeks exploring the biblical roots and theological foundation of our values and how we are called to live them as a church this year.  United Methodist Church OF GENEVA	January 8, 2023 INCLUSION 	January 15, 2023 WELCOMING 	January 22, 2023 GENEROSITY 
	January 29, 2023 COMPASSION 	February 5, 2023 OPEN-MINDED 	February 12, 2023 SERVING OTHERS 



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Preamble

Thank you for sharing in worship today. I am Rob Hamilton, senior pastor and last month we started a series that not only talks about the values we've discerned together as a congregation, but we are trying to root those values in the Gospel. This is so that we can be more intentional and faithful in living out our mission as a church which is: *We illuminate our community with God's grace as we lovingly accept, listen to, and serve all in the Spirit of Jesus.*

So far, we've covered the values of inclusion, welcoming, generosity, and compassion. Today, I'll talk about open-minded and we'll conclude the series with Pastor Lisa's message on serving others. If you want to see where we've been, our online worship page at genevaumc.org or our [YouTube page](#) can help bring us up to speed.

Today, as we look at the value of open-minded, which at UMCG we have defined that to mean "We value respectful dialogue." I had read for us today, the opposite of respectful dialogue and I'll try to unpack that passage and look at some positive examples for the next 15 minutes or so in today's message. Before we do that, I want to invite us all to pray that the same Spirit that was in Jesus might be with all of us as we explore the scripture texts and in my expounding on them today. Let's pray:

Prayer of Illumination

Jesus,

Thank you for your Spirit that is set loose upon all flesh. I thank you for your Spirit that moves in this church through the Moving Forward Initiative calling us to find a new identity in you. Keep your Spirit moving in us now, in my words, in their hearing and in their doing - that we might follow your Spirit's leading faithfully as your people called United Methodist of Geneva. Amen.

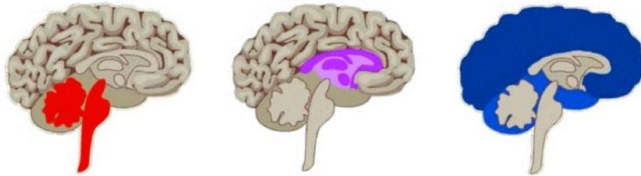
Sermon

I have to wonder if being open-minded doesn't come natural to us as a species. I know that when mad, scared, or stressed the brain floods with the hormone, cortisol. This causes instinctive behaviors from the reptilian part of the brain to engage. These behaviors are automated for survival - we fight, flight or freeze. When the reptilian brain core is engaged there is not a lot of openness to that part of the brain.



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Lizard Brain	Mammal Brain	Human Brain
Brain stem & cerebellum	Limbic System	Neocortex
Fight or flight	Emotions, memories, habits	Language, abstract thought, imagination, consciousness
Autopilot	Decisions	Reasons, rationalizes

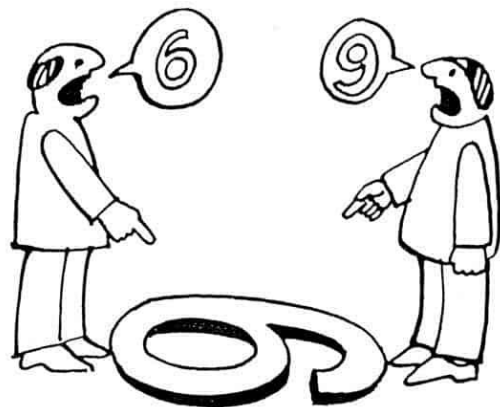


The limbic or mammalian brain is where our emotions and feelings originate, and that part of the brain is what drives us to seek pleasure and avoid pain. This part of the brain is also a significant driving force in our behavior, and it can act like an elephant in our lives - when docile and calm this part of our brain can be easy

going, but when it becomes energized there is little to stop it.

It is the neocortex where the ability to think, create, imagine, speak, and rationalize resides. This theory of how the brain is both constructed and works is called the Triune Brain theory proposed by the American physician and neuroscientist Paul D. MacLean in the 1960s. I find this title for the theory to be apropos for Christians because I think it's interesting that our triune God perhaps intended to create our brains in such a way that keeps life possible and certainly interesting.

The photo I placed at the top of the bulletin and that you see on screen I think is both an illustration of perspective and open-mindedness. The two cartoon figures are both correct from their perspective, but from the drawn-on expressions on their faces it seems like the neocortex is taking a back seat to the other brain centers as they look ready to duel over whether it's a 6 or a 9 they are looking at. We, the reader, have the advantage of perspective. We are free to engage in dialogue over the whole illustrated scenario.



I find that being open-minded is one of the hardest things to do. It's hard to get perspective, especially when advertisers, media and politicians work hard to engage our reptilian and limbic brains to get us to spend money, to stay safe or feel good. It feels like everywhere we turn we're invited to shut down that neocortex



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and just react. When we react from our reptilian or limbic brain centers respectful dialogue rarely is the characteristic behavior. It happens to everyone, even Jesus.

In the passage, we heard Dick read for us today, we see Jesus reacting. Jesus is known for healing anyone who approaches him. Jesus has the honest reputation for not judging someone's moral character to see if they are worthy of being healed. Jesus has the honest reputation of healing outsiders and sinners freely and graciously. I don't think the Canaanite woman - a mother - was out of place coming to Jesus asking for healing for her daughter. Even though as a Canaanite, she would be subject to

typical racial discrimination from a Jew of Jesus' stature. I don't know what was going on with Jesus, but his response to her was atypical for him.

Jesus tries ignoring her, which he rarely ignores anyone. Like in Luke 8, even with a massive crowd



surrounding him, Jesus was able to spot Jairus - a desperate father who needed a miracle to save his dying 12 year-old daughter. In that same crowd, Jesus noticed the hemorrhaging woman who touched the back of his outer garment and stopped to attend to her needs. Jesus is typically an open person, but not here with this Canaanite mother.

Still, the Canaanite mother tries to entreat Jesus with dialogue. She's not demanding, if anything she's respectful. But in the second instance Jesus tries dismissing her without actually even acknowledging the Canaanite mother's presence. This, too, is unusual behavior for Jesus. We remember how Jesus had a nice long chat with a Samaritan woman at the well in John 4 to bring healing and redemption to her life. It seems Jesus isn't thinking clearly.

When the Canaanite mother wouldn't settle for being ignored, she continued to entreat Jesus into dialogue, and Jesus says what I find to be one of the most offensive things. Jesus says, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Did Jesus just call this woman and her sick daughter a dog?!? Come on



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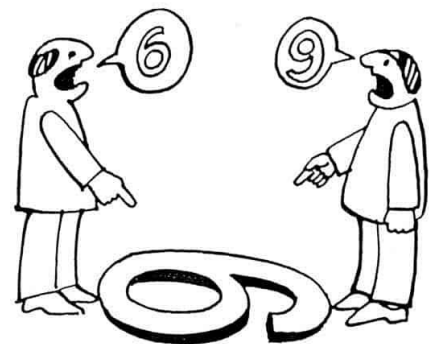
Jesus, I'm losing respect for you - we don't treat people this way and certainly don't refer to women as dogs - I'm ashamed and while I don't know the virgin Mary personally, I trust she was a woman of grace and would not have approved of her grown son's behavior. When the temple leaders brought the woman caught in adultery to Jesus in John 7, Jesus didn't shame her. Jesus kept an open-mind and invited the mob to do the same when he told them those without sin should be the first to cast a stone of punishment against her. That open-mindedness dispersed the crowd away, spared the woman

her life, and is a strong example of how we can keep an open-mind and be free from judgement. But that's not what is happening in this exchange between Jesus and the Canaanite mother.

The faith of this Canaanite mother and her ability to keep the conversation going, keeping an open-mind herself and with her persistence calling Jesus to do the same, is impressive. She didn't draw up sides. She didn't call names. She was committed for her daughter's sake to bring out the best in Jesus and she did. Jesus' mind opens up and he heals the Canaanite mother's daughter and commends her faith and persistence. I hope the gospel author Matthew forgot to include Jesus' apology for his cringe-worthy behavior. -

I have to wonder if one of the reasons this story is recorded in two gospels is to show us how hard it is to be open-minded. When I referenced this story when talking about the value of inclusion, I said the same thing. I think being inclusive and open-minded is hard. It is hard because it forces us to get the blood flowing in our neocortex after our hormones have activated our reptilian or limbic brain centers.

At the same time, respectful dialogue is so important to our growth. Being respectful in dialogue opens us to growth in grace. Sometimes we can be so self-assured we are right - that it's a 6 and not a 9 or a 9 and not a 6, that we miss the greater picture. We don't stop to ask: "Gosh, I hear





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you say this is 6, but to me it is most certainly a 9. Tell me how you've come to your conclusion." And then together we discover a bigger world with more opportunities.

I don't know what tripped Jesus up that day with the Canaanite mother, but for the rest of his ministry, I read stories of him being open to people's needs and their stories. Healing, wholeness, and grace spread like wildfire. So much so that Jesus became a threat to the rock brains who didn't think God could come to the world through servant leader like him who generally insisted on loving everyone. Even when Jesus doesn't live into his ideal fully, the open-mindedness of one woman kept the dialogue running and it saved her daughter's life.

Oh, how our world needs respectful dialogue and how powerful the forces are that work to close us off to each other so that we might be easily directed to act in ways that bring harm to ourselves and each other. And when we struggle, we need each other to help us along the way. In fact, I don't always end with a plug, but in two weeks we are hosting a Conflict Transformation Skills Workshop that will teach us how to deescalate ourselves and keep an open mind in the toughest situations. Normally you'd pay over \$100 for this workshop, but were offering it free with a requested donation for lunch and I believe it will help us minimize the days we take after Jesus' one bad day and make us more able to illuminate God's grace not just in our church but the whole world. Amen.

[Click here to learn more or sign up for the Conflict Transformation Skills Workshop.](#)