

October 23, 2022
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
Pastor Matt Duerr

TRUE U-Give Him the “E”

Peace to you, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. True U, last week we had “Give them the F.” Give them forgiveness. Today we have, “Give them the big E! Or actually, ‘Give Him the big E!’”

To start out, I'd like to just share a little bit of something from my life. I was a teacher. And in the 1981-82 school year. I had two rounds of student teaching where I was underneath master teachers, learning from them. One was named Mickey Reinertson and the other was Kent Schlicktemeyer; both definitely master teachers. And uniquely, both of them shared with me the exact same advice. They stressed two things about teaching. Number one, expectation. If you expect it, you'll get it. If you don't, you won't. So they always said, ‘expect from your students.’ But that led to the second ‘E’ and it's the big one for today, excellence.

Both of them pointed to a school in Kansas City that had ranked as the worst school in the country. They got a new principal. And he stressed excellence. In fact, he had the motto “Nothing but excellence.” In short, he said, ‘teachers, you will provide excellent lessons. You will take the time to write out lesson plans, make sure you have clear objectives, clear procedures, clear results. And if you give excellent lessons, then you have the right to expect excellent work from your students. And it totally changed the school.

And so, they both have that model “Nothing but excellence.” Simply saying excellence in teaching, excellent lessons enable you to expect excellent work back. It carried over into coaching, provide excellent practice with excellent purpose and excellent instructions and you can expect excellent effort from players. And then it went to living. Model excellence by modeling God’s mercy, His grace, His forgiveness and then expect it back from your students towards you and towards each other.

And then excellence in ministry. So, what is excellence in ministry? If we go to our New Testament reading this morning from Philippians four verse eight, we see that Saint Paul tells the people of Philippi, “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Think about what is excellent, we think about what is worthy of praise, which takes us to that WWJD. What would Jesus do? And you have heard me say no, that's all wrong. We should be asking the question, what did Jesus do?”

But today we're going to take it a step further. WDJP, what did Jesus praise? He praised excellence. Look at our gospel this morning. We see that Jesus is in the temple. He was in the court of the Gentiles where the offering box was. That way everybody could give offerings, and He sees the rich putting their gifts in which reminds us again of what Jesus said in Matthew 23, verse five about the riches they are putting into the offering plate. They would do all their deeds to be seen by others. And so, Jesus sees this happening and He then sees, I quote, “a poor widow who put in two small copper coins.” And Jesus makes the observation that the rich, “gave out of their abundance.” They had plenty to give, so it wasn't a problem for them to give. But she, out of her poverty, put in all she had to live on. This woman had amazing obedience. She understood that God was going to give everything to save her, and she was going to give everything back to Him. It was her priority and there is excellence. It was going way beyond a tithe, making a love offering, an agape love offering, sacrificing self for the good of God's Ministry. And how in the world could she do that? Because she had excellent faith. She trusted that God would provide for her. And that is what fits all the commendations that Jesus makes in the Gospels.

We see that when the Centurion come down and says, ‘Lord, my servant is lying at home suffering terribly.’ Jesus says to him, ‘I will come and heal him.’ And that Centurion comes back and says, ‘Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. But only say the word, and my servant will be healed, for I too am a man under authority. And I tell my soldiers, go here, and they go here, do this, and they do this, Lord, just give that word.’ And what was

Jesus's response to that Centurion's statement of faith, "Just say the word?" "Truly, I tell you. With no one in Israel. Have I found such great faith."

Or consider Matthew 15. A Canaanite woman, a Gentile, comes to Jesus and tells him that 'my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.' The disciple's response is, 'send her away. Jesus, she's making too much noise.' And Jesus turns and addresses this Canaanite, this Gentile woman and says, 'I was sent to the lost sheep of Israel. It's not right to take the children's bread and to throw it to the dogs.' Boy, He puts her down. He calls her a dog. Now understand, dog back then was much worse than anything we think about with dogs today. In fact, dogs today we've got rescue missions for them. But dogs back then were seen as unclean, vile animals that would eat anything they could find, including if you were dying and you're lying on the side of the road, the dogs would come and lick your wounds and anticipation of eating you. And yet does this woman say? 'You have offended me, you're racist!' No, she comes right back with; 'Yes, Lord. Yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table.' Jesus looks at her and says, "Oh woman, Great is your faith. Be it done for you as you desire."

We see it again in Matthew 9:22. There's that woman with the hemorrhage that you know, just touches Jesus. Because she feels that if she can just touch Him, His power will heal her. What does he say to her? "Take heart, daughter, your faith has made you well."

Right after raising Jairus's daughter from the dead, Jesus comes upon two blind men. They asked Jesus to heal them. What does Jesus say back to them? "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" Their response is very simple. Yes LORD. His response back? "According to your faith, be it done to you." And they were healed.

In Luke 19 we have that very familiar account of the 10 lepers. One returns to Jesus, falls on his knees before the Lord and worships Him, and the Lord's response is "Rise up, go your way, your faith has made you well."

In fact, if I say Hebrews 11 to you, some of you are right away going to say, 'oh, that's the Hall of Fame of faith.' A very familiar phrase is repeated over and over in that chapter. "By faith." By faith Able offered his best to the Lord because the Lord has so blessed him. By faith Abraham obeyed and went

to a land he didn't see, went to a land he didn't even have a map for. He went because the Lord said, go, and I'll show it to you as you go. By faith, Abraham offered up his only son, Isaac as a sacrifice. The Lord stopped him because by faith Abraham was willing to do it, figuring that if he even killed him, God would raise him from the dead. By Faith Sarah conceived and had Isaac. By faith, Isaac then had blessed both Jacob and Esau. And by faith Jacob blessed Joseph, and by Faith Joseph gave the instructions from his death bed saying that 'when I die and I am put into the Egyptian sarcophagus, take it with you when the Lord takes you back to the Promised Land, because I know He's going to deliver on that promise. By Faith Moses was hidden in the reeds of the Nile by his parents because they trusted that God would take care of this child. And by faith that same Moses refused to be Pharaoh's son, which ended up having a death sentence put on him. By faith Moses left Egypt and by Faith Moses kept the Passover both that time in Egypt and for 40 years in the wilderness. By faith the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, and that was quite a remarkable event, two walls of water on the side. They could crush down on you at any time, but by faith in God they entered the Red Sea, went through, and were delivered. And by faith, 40 years later when they came to the Promised Land, the walls of Jericho fell. But when they fell, not everybody was killed because by faith, Rahab the prostitute was saved.

So, getting back to excellence; what is the excellent thing that Jesus and the writer of Hebrews commends people for? Excellent faith. And this is what we are told to think about, these things. All of these people put God first in everything.

But I have to just grab one of them for a moment, a favorite of mine, Joseph. Think of Joseph and everything that went wrong in his life. His brothers wanted to kill him. They threw him in a pit. Instead of killing him, they figured, hey, let's make some money off it. We'll send sell him to the Ishmaelites, traders who are coming by. And those traders then sold him into slavery in Egypt to Potiphar, a lead general for Pharaoh. What did Joseph do to his brothers that deserved this? Nothing. He faithfully served Potiphar. He faithfully serves as a slave. So much so that Potiphar puts him in charge of everything. Now Potiphar's wife looks at Joseph and says, 'Yeah, that's a good looking fellow there. I think I'd like to be with him.' But Joseph did what was

right. By faith in God, he followed God's words and God's command. He would not fall to the temptations of Potiphar's wife. Who then lied about him to Potiphar so that Joseph was put in jail. Whereupon he began to serve the jailer so faithfully that the jailer put him in charge of everything. Do you see a pattern here? Joseph had faith in God and knew that God expected excellence from him. And he gave God back excellence in faith because he figured God has a reason, God has a purpose, He'll see me through it.

And so, God does bring to Joseph in prison Pharaoh's baker and Pharaoh's wine cup bearer. And Joseph interprets their dreams and - long story short; Joseph by faith becomes a powerful example for all of us to do right no matter what is wrong, and he gets elevated to second in command in Egypt. By faith, excellent faith; and it's a faith that we can see. He did what was right because he loved God. He was obedient. But he trusted that God would use it to the glory of God and to the expansion of His kingdom.

Which brings us to today. Much like last week, this is another form of the ultimate object lesson. An object lesson on excellence. Faith is what Jesus commends as excellent. Faithful in prayer, faithful in obedience, faithful in tithing, faithful in worship. Trusting that God will see you through, even though what we do by faith may well be ridiculed by society. We will be told that we're stupid for doing so.

Like last week, I'd also like you to consider this. I'm not really asking you to ask yourself, what is excellence? What do I need to do? I honestly think you all know what it is; I just talked about it. Prayer, obedience, faithful worship, tithing, giving back to God, your time, your talent, your treasures because He gave them to you.

But like last week, I think the real question is this. Who needs to see your excellent faith in action? Who can you be the Joseph for? Who needs to see that no matter what comes, you will act out of faith and trust in God. Maybe it's a child, maybe it's a grandchild, or even a great grandchild. Maybe it's a neighbor, maybe it's someone you don't even know. But ask yourself that question, "Who needs to see my faith in God?"

And so, like last week and the week before, we end the sermon with a challenge. Be powerful, be effective, yes-be spicy; be the ingredient that brings

good taste to Christianity and to life. Yes, be the person who shows others the way to heaven. Be the one who forgives, and be the one who is excellent in faith. In our Saviors' Name, Amen.