

So I have a question this morning. Are we brave? (pause) Are we brave enough? (pause) Are we brave enough to be truly known by other people? (awkwardly long pause)

As a part of the ordination process I've been encountering the work of a research professor at the University of Houston whose name is Brené Brown. Dr. Brown has spent the last 20 years studying courage, vulnerability, shame and empathy. She has written five New York Times best sellers. I am going to share a little of what I have been learning, but if you want to know more about Dr. Brené Brown there is a link to her blog and a link to her TED talks in the footnotes of this morning's sermon.¹

To begin I think we need to understand a couple of key points. #1 Jesus never said being a Christian was going to be easy. (pause) Amen? **Amen.** In Deuteronomy we are told to, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all of your might" (Deut 6:5). Jesus echoed these words in Matthew 22:37. Do y'all know what that means? (pause) Do any of y'all know what this verse means? (awkwardly long pause) It means we are to love God above everything. We are to love God more than the NASCAR race on TV on a Sunday. We are to love God more than we want to go see the Panthers play the Seattle Seahawks today at Bank of America stadium. We are to love God more than tailgating and thinking about where we are going to eat lunch. (pause) It means we have to love God more than our fears about people who are different from us, and more than our opinions about what scares us. The only thing that can stamp out the fear in our country is love; and God is love. Amen? **Amen.** With so much fear mongering in the media and on the news these days the love of God is the only thing that can conquer fear – both our fears and the fears in our nation.

I think George Thorogood asked the question, "Who do you love? Who do you love?" (pause) Sisters and brothers who are we supposed to love? (pause) Leviticus 19:18 says, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." When Peter asks Jesus who is my neighbor Jesus tells the disciples the story of the Good Samaritan. The moral of this story is your neighbor is anyone, and everyone who does not live with you.² That includes the people with whom we disagree. That includes the people who do not follow God's law the way we do, or the way we want them to. (pause) Do you hear what I'm saying? (pause) How should we respond to God's command? (awkwardly long pause) Uh uh. #1 Jesus never said being a Christian was going to be easy.

#2 Jesus gave us this command, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you;" (Matt 28:19-20). (pause) About a year ago, maybe a year and a half ago Gary who runs the power point for us on Sunday morning asked me this question, "How do I affectively evangelize to people? How can I be more effective in bringing people to church?" (pause) I don't remember what my answer was, but I remember thinking that has got to be the worst answer anyone has ever given to that question. (pause) The feeling stuck with me. Have any of y'all ever done that? Have you ever answered a question and felt like, "Gee, I think that's the right answer, but man that answer stinks!" (pause) That's why I remembered Gary's question. Gary, I just might have a better answer this morning.

¹ <https://brenebrown.com/>
https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability?language=en
https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_listening_to_shame

² Borrowed from Rev. Laura Auten

I think we have to start by attacking this idea, “I don’t know enough,” and, “I’m not good enough,” to talk about God with people I do not know. Or to put it another way, “I know I am not walking with God the way I should, and they are going to see right through me.” (pause) Have any of y’all ever felt that way before? (awkwardly long pause) God knows I have. (pause) I think this is the result of shame. (pause) Talking about shame gets us into Dr. Brené Brown’s work and I’d like to share that with you for a few moments.

So we need a distinction and some definitions. Our distinction is there is a difference between shame and guilt. (repeat) According to Brené Brown shame is a focus on self. Guilt is a focus on behavior. Guilt says, “I am so sorry. I made a mistake.” (pause) Shame says, “I am sorry. I am a mistake.” (awkwardly long pause) Many, many terrible things are related to shame: “addiction, depression, violence, aggression, bullying, suicide, [and] eating disorders,” to name a few. Very often guilt is a response to shame. “I am so sorry I stole from you to buy drugs.” (pause) “I am so sorry I beat up that kid at school because he was different from me.” So many of us are struggling with all of this shame and guilt, and it is keeping us from sharing the Gospel.

Brené Brown says shame sends two messages, “never good enough,” and, “who do you think you are?”

For Christians that message often sounds like, “I don’t know enough about what it means to be a Christian. I don’t know if I want to make any changes to my life. So why should I talk to others about changing their lives.”

If we can claw our way past that message then shame hits us with this one, “Who do you think you are? You are a sinner, and you will never – ever be right with God.”

My sisters and brothers everyone in the world struggles with shame. Everyone. (pause) God knows we struggle with shame; and guilt; and sin because God *knows* us.

Read Psalm 139:1-6

My brothers and sisters please hear this good news. God already knows you are a sinner. God already knows we can’t get right on our own. (pause) And God sent God’s only Son anyway. God sent God’s son Jesus Christ to be murdered on a cross when we couldn’t get right on our own. God did this because God loves us. God loves you. Amen? **Amen**. God loves you. Amen?! **Amen!** How can we tap into God’s love to battle shame? (pause) We have to be brave.

#3 Are we brave enough? If we want to share the Gospel with others we have to be brave enough to be vulnerable. We have to be brave enough to put ourselves out there when we do not have it all together. We cannot tarry till we’re better because if we do we will never come at all. We cannot afford to wait until we are bullet proof. We cannot afford to wait until we are perfect. God has not called us to be judge and jury over the unchurched. God has called us to follow Christ’s example – to make disciples by walking with people – right where they are in their lives. We cannot wait until they are perfect. (pause) We cannot wait until we are perfect. We cannot wait. We have to get up off of our pews and go.

Here’s what that needs to look like. We have to start actively looking for ways to grow closer to God ourselves. Our leaders need to be actively involved in Bible study, and involved with some kind of small group. The members of our church need to be actively looking for ways to grow closer to God. They can’t wait on the pastor to feed them. Grown people don’t wait on a parent. They get up and go to the fridge. The members of our church need to be looking for ways to draw closer to God.

What comes next is being brave enough to be vulnerable with what you do not know. Before I left Charlotte for seminary I was working as a courier. Most days I would have about 20 min of down time at about the same

time of day. Not surprising I would end up at a Bojangles to read my Bible. There were a couple of UPS drivers who would come through there and stop for their lunch about that time. They saw me reading my Bible and come to find out they were in a Bible study too. So we got to talking. They would ask me questions. I would ask them questions. It was a really good thing for all of us. We all grew closer to God and the growing closer to God drew us closer to one another. That is the power of being vulnerable.

If we are willing to put ourselves out there – to be genuinely curious about other people, and to allow them to be curious about us we will make new friends, and those friends will probably not look like us. When we look for opportunities to make new friends Christ will provide the opportunity to share what is most important to us. However, we have to start by putting God first as the thing that's most important thing to us. Then we can truly be open and curious and vulnerable and able to offer the love of Christ to new people. However, if we are going to do those things we have to be willing to be brave. We have to be brave for the good news of Jesus Christ. My sisters and brothers in Christ, are we brave enough?

There are so many things which would block us from sharing the Gospel. So to help us think about what's important I'd like for you to listen to this song. This song is by Third Day and it's called, "Your Words."

In the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen