

Sermon Title "Front Line Obsession" ; Mark Nicolle, parish member
Church of the Good Shepherd, Pitman NJ ; May 12, 2019 – 10 AM Service
Lectionary: Year C: Acts 9:36-43 ; Revelation 7:9-17 ; John 10:22-30 ; Psalm 23

...Good morning.....let us pray...

Holy Spirit, teach us truth, Reveal to us Jesus. Amen. ...please be seated.

"No one will snatch them out of my hand."

Important words from Jesus in today's Gospel...
and appropriate words, perhaps, for mother's day...

"No one will snatch them out of my hand."

Picture with me...in your mind's eye,
a mother, a "mom", standing with her four year old child
at the edge of a busy road
waiting to cross over.

in **MY** mind, I SEE the silhouette of a young boy
reaching up and holding his mother's hand,
while mom looks both ways
before stepping into the road with her son.

Perhaps a good description of that scene...
Yet, anyone here who has crossed a busy road
with their young child **KNOWS**
that is **NOT** what is **REALLY** going on in that picture.

That young boy is NOT REALLY holding his **MOTHER'S** hand.
He may **THINK** he is,
and probably would remember it that way,
but what is actually happening...
That mother is reaching down
and **CLUTCHING** her son's hand...
as they cross that road...

A VICE GRIP comes to mind.

That mother would never rely on her child

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to keep holding **HER** hand
when there is even a REMOTE THREAT of oncoming traffic.
She would never allow any separation to occur.

"No one will snatch them out of my hand."

There was a book published in 2016,
...written by two gentlemen, JOHN ZOOK AND JAMES ALLEN
...TITLED "The Founders Mentality",
And in that book,
they talk about how successful companies
remain successful over a long period of time
by maintaining,
what they call
the "**founders mentality**". ¹

They make the point,
that as successful companies grow,
they often become overburdened
with bureaucracy and complex processes
...they lose their edge,

they lose the mindset
that made them so successful
to begin with.
they lose, for a variety of reasons
the BOLD and AMBITIOUS MINDSET
of their FOUNDER. ²

Home Depot is a great example of this...

In 1978 the founders of Home Depot
BERNARD MARCUS and ARTHOR BLANK
had a bold idea
that redefined the world
of DO-IT-YOUR-SELF HOME IMPROVEMENT.

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They were big on customer service,
And they trained and encouraged
their employees to develop
ADVISORY relationships with customers,
offering ADVICE and in-store CLINICS...
with a mantra of WHATEVER IT TAKES" ...

They were on fire with success!

And then, 12 years later,
Around the year 2000,
In order to deal with
their tremendous SUCCESS and GROWTH,
they brought in "professional" management

and started focusing on things
that **ERODED** their... .. FOUNDER'S mentality.
They went, as some said,
From "DO IT YOURSELF" to "FIND IT YOURSELF"
And in the next 7 years,
the company's market value declined 55%. ³
They HAD LOST
their FOUNDER'S MENTALITY

<PAUSE>

IN THEIR BOOK, the authors spend 183 pages
describing exactly what they mean
by the "founders mentality",
How to maintain it
and for some...Like Home Depot
how to get it back.

And one of things they talk about...
One key aspect

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of having a founders mentality
is something they call
"frontline obsession".⁴

The FRONT LINE, is JUST THE PLACE where a company
Meets, and serves, their customers.

It might be in a store,
on a website,
on the phone,
or ALL of those places
wherever **THAT** company interacts
with **THEIR** customers...the FRONT LINE.

And put simply, front line **OBSESSION**
is...an obsession with your customer...
with.....your customer's experience,
something the founders of Home Depot
understood very well
and are presently trying to RECAPTURE.

"No one will snatch them out of my hand."

Earlier this year, in February
the world lost an ICON in the **FINANCIAL** industry...
in 2004 this man was named
in Time Magazine's
100 most influential people in the world...
the top 100 people who shape our world.

In 1975 this person founded the company
Where I have worked
Since moving to New Jersey almost 30 years ago.

His name was John Bogle,

and the company
he started is called Vanguard.

Now Jack, as he was known to his associates,
Mr. Bogle was an ICON for a number of reasons.
BUT one of those
was that he was considered to be a champion
...not just for his own customers,
...but for **ALL** investors

he had a penchant
For providing folks with
the best possible chance for investment success
While investing for retirement,
or saving for education.

I knew Jack Bogle personally,
he was an incredible man,
very humble on a personal level,
yet extremely feisty and outspoken
when it came to his passion,
which was giving investors
a fair shake.

He eschewed the trappings of wealth himself...
He refused to ride in a limousine
He ate often in the cafeteria...
he would grab a tray and look for someone,
or a group of other crew members to sit with...
he was very personable,
and he was extremely philanthropic

I not only had the privilege of knowing Mr. Bogle,
But I also heard him speak many times
He was obsessed.
He was obsessed with serving not only
his own customers, every day,

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but he was obsessed with raising the tide,
raising the sea level if you will
for the entire industry,
for all investors.

NOW, All of us have had the experience
of waiting on hold
when calling a large company
like an insurance company,
or tech support for your home computer
and waiting...for a long time...ON HOLD.

Well, Jack Bogle **INSTITUTED** something at Vanguard
called The Swiss Army.
I know about this because
I was a **MEMBER** of the Swiss Army

<PAUSE>

every manager in the company
was drafted into the Swiss Army
no matter what you did
whether in Human Resources, HR,
or, in my case, Software Engineering, IT,

We were all trained to answer calls
from our customers...
TRAINED to talk about our funds,
answer questions,
provide information,
or process transactions...

Any time that our call volumes would spike,
for whatever reason,
be it a DOWN TURN in the market,
or some BIG EVENT in the NEWS,

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the bugle would sound,
and the call would go out
for the Swiss Army
to drop everything
and jump on the phones,

We had large empty rooms with desks and PC's and phones,
just waiting for the Swiss Army...
quite an investment!

And leading the charge would be Jack Bogle,
seated right along side the rest of the crew
taking calls from our investors.
Not just to keep THEIR TIME
waiting on hold to a minimum
But also to ensure their needs and concerns
Were addressed.

We all knew, that Jack Bogle, our founder
had a front line obsession,
...indeed, he embodied it.

"No one will snatch them out of my hand."

Mothers...have a front line obsession.

When it comes to their kids...
mom's clearly have a founders mentality.
They rarely get confused about their priority.

When it comes to nurturing their children,
when it comes to looking out for their kids,
protecting their child!
...such as when crossing
a busy road,

MOTHERS exhibit front line obsession.

"No one will snatch them out of my hand."

OK, I **AM** going somewhere with all this...

There is a very strong image

CONSISTENT throughout TODAY'S scriptures...

it is an image we in this parish

are all very familiar with...

it is the image of Jesus our shepherd...

our GOOD Shepherd.

From the Apostle John in the book of Revelation we heard

"for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

AND From the 23rd Psalm...

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters. He revives my soul and guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake."

And Finally, from John's Gospel... Jesus is speaking to the Jewish leaders...

"The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. **No one will snatch them out of my hand.**"

I would suggest to you that

Jesus has a front line obsession

He is obsessed with his sheep

Jesus is obsessed with xxxx xxxxx,

he is obsessed with xxxx xxxxxx,

Jesus is obsessed with xxxxxxxx xxxxxx

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Folks, He is obsessed with
each and every one of us!

These images of the lamb,
and of the Good Shepherd SPEAK
to that obsession...

they speak to the Love that our God has for us.

"No one will snatch them out of my hand."

So, what does it look like for **US** as the body of Christ,
to have a Founder's Mentality?

What does it look like for us here at Good Shepherd
to have a front line obsession?

<PAUSE>

Our Church, is a very WELCOMING place.

I love the things we do
to welcome people
into our CHURCH, and into our PARISH...

I love that we have greeters
who's ministry it is
to officially, and warmly, welcome people
into our church every week
and OFFER VISITORS a coffee mug
stuffed with great information
about our wonderful parish

I love that Mother Susan welcomes everyone
to the alter EVERY week
to receive the body and blood of Jesus

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I love that we welcome our children,
in all their glory,
in our worship service...every week
AND at the table, to receive Jesus

I love that we have dedicated parishioners
who sacrifice and give of themselves
to teach our children about Jesus every Sunday.

I love that we have people who's ministry it is
to pray with people during communion...
meeting them in their pain and struggle,
or rejoicing with them in thanksgiving

I love that we have a group of prayer warriors
Who I reached out to myself three weeks ago
To pray for a friend
who was in serious trouble

I love these things because they make ME feel good about our Church.

I love these things
because as an ANGLICAN, as an EPICOPALIAN,
I am proud of what we offer in our tradition,
and I believe that God is **PLEASED** with us
when we offer these things.

These things EXHIBIT a front line obsession,
And represent what it is
to have OUR founder's mentality.

I would suggest to you, however,
that there is something else,
something else that is important
something ELSE that sets us apart
AS the body of Christ,

AND exhibits a front line obsession,

<PAUSE>

As members of His Body

We each have a story

We each...have a **DIFFERENT** story

but it **IS** the story of OUR GOD IN OUR LIVES

We each have a story

Of BROKENESS in our lives...WE ALL DO...

And SOMEWHERE in our brokenness

SOMEWHERE in our life

We WERE introduced to Jesus...

We were introduced to Jesus

and **ALSO** part of our story...**FOR EACH OF US,**

IS JESUS BEING BROKEN FOR US!

And in **HIS** brokenness

We are reconciled to God.

Jesus is the reconciler

That is the story of Easter

And through that reconciliation,

We become his people

And the sheep of his pasture.

We become members of HIS body

Members of the body of Christ.

And **AS** members of HIS body

We are ALL called to a **MINISTRY** of reconciliation...

between God, and the people God places in front of us

the people God gives to us in our lives

WE are not the reconcilers.

The ministry of reconciliation,

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Our ministry,
is merely to introduce people to the reconciler,
who is Jesus Christ.

And **WE DO THAT** by sharing our story.

When we share **OUR** story of Jesus,
we exhibit our founders mentality.
That is **OUR** front line obsession.
It is our willingness
to at some point,
at some time,
in our own way,
to share our story
with the people
we encounter
in our lives.

PERSONALLY, I find that very difficult to do,
It is a very hard THING
for me to share my story...
Why ruin a perfectly good coffee hour
By bringing Jesus into it!!!?

But despite how difficult
it may or may not be
regardless of how we choose to do it,
we **ARE** called to it.

It is important to share our story of Jesus
with one another
because it is Jesus
who truly changes lives.
It is **ONLY** Jesus who can transform
the brokenness in our lives,
NO ONE ELSE

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No matter how together we think we are
Or how broken we know we are,
Sharing our story ABOUT JESUS
is **OUR** founders mentality
And represents true front line obsession.

"No one will snatch them out of my hand."

NOTES

- 1) The Founders Mentality, Chris Zook & James Allen, Harvard Business Review Press, 2016, pp 52-54
- 2) ""
- 3) ""
- 4) ""

NIV Translation