

*Say My Name***A Message for All Faiths Unitarian Congregation****By The Rev. CJ McGregor****Delivered on March 22, 2020**

Over a month ago I nailed down the topic for today's message. At that time, I had no idea that we would be separated, each of us experiencing the effects of being distanced from one another, our families, our community. I guess that makes me a prophet...or not. My ego is intact, and I don't believe that. It is so important to stay connected in some way during this time. It's easy to sit home, perhaps alone, and wonder if anyone is thinking about us or do they know we are still here, afraid, confused, or isolated? We all need to be acknowledged. We need to hear our names spoken to cement our place on the planet, to know that someone sees us and recognizes our humanity. One of the reasons we gather at All Faiths is to meet our human need for community, to be in relationship, to be recognized, to matter.

I've been honest with you about my early childhood. I've shared how traumatic it was due to abuse and neglect. While preparing this message I remembered a time in my childhood when I was about 9. I remember wondering if I mattered, if anyone would notice if I were gone. I remember asking myself, "Why am I here?" It wasn't a deeply theological question for me. I literally was wondering why I existed. I wrote a question in my fourth-grade notebook. I asked, "Do you love me?" I understand not mattering.

While in seminary when asked to articulate the call to ministry I responded by saying that I desired deeper relationships with people. Relationships that were supportive and leaving people better off than when I met them. Today, it's no secret how I landed in ministry. My great desire to be in relationship that I never had growing up is fulfilled. I consider this a spiritual advantage of a traumatic childhood. When I think of people who made the biggest impact in my life, it was not their expertise or accomplishments that provided me with the direction, guidance and reassurance I needed. It was their sincere interest and belief in me. They let me know through their words and actions that I mattered. The people in our lives want that same validation. In fact, every single person you will ever meet shares this common desire. They want to know they matter.

Wanting to matter is a universal human need. First, you need to fully accept that you matter, and then it's incumbent on you to pass this message along. Would the people in your life answer, "yes" to the following questions: Do you see me? Do you hear me? Do you care about me? Do I matter to you? Angela Meirs

I wonder if you've ever asked yourself, "Do I matter?" We are connected by the need to matter and the need to belong. "Mattering" is measured with items like these: How important are you to others? How much do others pay attention to you? How much would you be missed if you went away? How interested are others in what you have to say? How much do other people depend upon you?

Professor of Psychology Christopher Petersen tells us, "According to research, mattering protects against depression. Not mattering is a problem for us as we age. More generally, it is a problem

for those who have retired, for those who have outlived their friends, and for those who represent a burden and only a burden to those who care for them.”

He says, “Let’s assume that mattering matters. The obvious question is how can we matter? I suggest that one good strategy for cultivating mattering is indirect, allowing other people to matter to you. Mattering is usually discussed as a feature of the individual, but it is likely as well a feature of one’s relationships with others. And I suspect mattering is highly contagious.” If you take an interest in those around you, if you depend on them, and if you miss them when they are gone, then you are also likely to matter to them. And good things will result.

The Professor I mentioned earlier took a lengthy leave of absence from the University of Michigan, from 2000 to 2013. When he returned, some of his colleagues greeted him by saying “What happened? Did you suddenly stop coloring your hair?” The correct answer, which he never voiced, was “Aging happened to me! You haven’t seen me for this entire decade. Sorry I am so inconsequential that you didn’t even notice I was gone.” The good news is that the people who mattered most to him of course knew he had been gone. They had been in touch, and some had visited him during his hiatus. His gray hair was no shock and thus unworthy of comment. They had turned gray, too, because that’s what people of a certain age do as time passes.

Think of the urban legend of the worker who died at his desk in a cubicle, and no one noticed for days. I’ve seen a picture of the gravestone of baseball great Jackie Robinson. The epitaph, which he wrote himself, said simply ““A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives. "For me, belonging means mattering. It means knowing that other people see you for who you are. That you can be authentic and still matter to others. This feeling takes time. It’s closely linked to the idea of flourishing. Flourishing is the presence of positivity, having good connections with others, and having mastery over one’s environment. It’s not a trait—it’s a state or spectrum of well-being that we have to work on daily. Nicole frazier

Maslow was right. As you probably know, once we have food and shelter, but before we can seek self-actualization we must feel safety, belonging and mattering. Without these three essential keys a person cannot perform, innovate, feel emotionally engaged, agree, move forward. Safety, belonging, and mattering are essential to your brain and your ability to perform at work, at home, and in life overall. The greater the feeling of safety, both emotional and physical so we can take risks; the greater the feeling of connection with others, or the feeling that we’re in this together and we belong together; the greater the feeling that we personally matter and make a difference and are contributing to the greater good; then the greater the success of our congregation, the relationship, the family, the team, the individual.

In every communication, in every conflict, we are subconsciously either reinforcing or begging for safety, belonging, mattering or a combination. It’s neurological... it’s primal... there is nothing you can do to override or change this subterranean subconscious programming as much as you may try. Safety means creating an environment where we can take risks and stretch and grow. Is it safe to take risks at your company? Belonging means creating an environment where we all feel like a tight-knit tribe, we’re all equal and we’re rowing in the same direction. Mattering means each of us contributes individually in a unique way. We all make a difference. We’re appreciated and publicly acknowledged. We must identify whether it is safety and or belonging and or mattering that is most important to the people in our lives... and then do

everything we can to satisfy that subterranean subconscious need. I wonder which do you crave? Which do the most important people in your life crave?

As humans, we find purpose in doing. We find purpose and happiness in solving problems and connecting with one another. When that ability is taken away by a mandatory period of isolation, what do we do? It can cause risk for us to fall into depression, anxious thoughts, and/or spiritual lack. Since the world is undergoing a large scale experience of isolation, now more than ever we need to find human connection and stay grounded in who we are and what our world is. We need to work on feverishly avoiding feeling stagnant. As more and more of us are self-isolating and social distancing due to COVID-19, how do we stave off loneliness and keep connected? We know that loneliness and lack of social contact can have significant impacts on our mental and physical health so it's important that we all look out for one another.

And so, it is here at All Faiths whether we are sitting in the seats in our sanctuary or in a comfy chair in your pajamas, like you're doing right now, that we nurture one another, acknowledge one another, and see our humanity. We will need to rely on this practice of mattering for awhile according to the latest news. We will be distanced. However, the craving to be noticed and engaged that each of us has remains strong. Tell one person today in our congregation that they matter. Tell yourself that you matter. Let us work to remain close, concerned, and acknowledge our interdependence. I see you. I assure you that you matter to me. Your sense of safety and belonging matter to me. You matter to many in our congregation. Let us reach out and reinforce that. Go forth and matter! Christine Comaford

May it be so.