

Community Church of Issaquah

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The Importance of One

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Wouldn't you like to have one of the books of the Bible contain a personal letter that one of Christ's disciples wrote to you? Would you want it to talk about your importance in the church and to your "dear friend" John? The passage of scripture that was read for us today is simply that – a personal letter from John to his dear friend Gaius. The verses praise Gaius for what he does in the name of Christ even for strangers. Let me repeat one of the verses. "Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love."

Each time I read this letter from John, and by the way the Third Epistle of John is unique in that it contains no chapter, and only 14 verses. Wouldn't it be nice if Paul had taken some notice of this example in his writings? But there is a message here for each of us and it is this – each of us is important in doing God's work. Gaius had made his ministry to assisting and converting those who were strangers to his home village and to Jesus Christ. Yet it was those strangers who told the church how much Gaius loved them and how grateful they were. There are surely other examples of people who were converted to Christ and did significant work, but this story about a man named Gaius is a wonderful example of the importance of one person.

If I were to try to recall how many times someone has told me, “Oh, I’m not important.” Or “What I’m doing doesn’t really matter.” Or “It’s just me doing my thing.” I would have long, long lists of individuals. How is it that we learned from somewhere or someone that what we do and who we are doesn’t matter because we are just one. Even as a minister for many years, I sometimes wonder if what I am doing or what I have done matters. I am, after all, just one among millions of ministers.

A truth about the importance of one person hit me hard not long ago when I was asked to deliver a eulogy for the father of a dear friend. I was sitting at my desk and decided to turn on music from my radio. It wasn’t long before a song came on that jolted me and caused me to listen repeatedly, not even remembering when or how I had recorded that song. It’s a song written by a well-known musician of the past, Jimmy Webb. The title of the song is “Only One Life,” and here are the words.

*Only one life, just a single spark.
Only one life, what does it mean?
It’s only birth and death and everything between.
If living is a pointless chore,
Just existence, nothing more,
Why does only one life leave such an empty space?*

*Only one life – make it right or wrong,
Only one life.
Just another soul among so many,
So, who cares if one should fall?
But though we’re small, we’re full of magic.*

*When we touch the world, we change it all
With only one life.*

*We only have one chance to fight,
But if we live it right,
All we need is one life to make a difference here.
One life – it's such a small amount.
One life – to say we care so loud and clear.
We have to make it count after all
With only one life.*

There are myriads of examples of the contribution one individual has made, but we don't have to look outside our own congregation to see the importance of only one life. If I were to ask each of you to share the name of one person who has touched your life or changed your life or inspired your life, I am quite sure you would have a name to share instantly. Let me pause her for just a moment of silence and ask you to bring to your mind that one person. Let the name move from your mind to your heart. Who is it?

I shared the little story of the Lace Snail because it illustrates so clearly what one creature can do without even knowing the impact it will have on someone else. If you will tolerate me, I'd like to share again a personal encounter I had with one person who did one thing that made a huge difference to others.

*I recall an incident which I experienced while riding a train on my way to my first year of college.
As I sat half awake, I noticed a rather aged conductor coming down the aisle. His worn uniform spoke of a*

bygone day of passenger trains that his wrinkled face and slow step tried to deny. I wondered why he stopped and carefully picked up and refolded every discarded newspaper he passed. As he punched my ticket, his two big pockets seemed ready to burst with papers from almost every stop along the way.

He continued this for several hours and by this time we had begun our long slow winding route through the hills of rural Alabama and Mississippi. I began to notice shanties and small cabins along the tracks and people standing on their porches as if they were waiting for something to happen. I glanced back down the tracks and saw white bundles being thrown from the train. I knew what was happening and I hurried to the opening between cars and there stood the conductor – delivering yesterday's papers to these little cabins. People waved or nodded and the train rounded another curve and they were out of sight.

One curve when there are millions in this world; one conductor where there are thousands in the world; one isolated family when there are millions in the world, but what a void there would have been if one man had not cared enough to do consistently what is reasonable for one person to do.

Does one life matter? I think you know the answer to that question. And what is the answer to the question, "What is the importance of one?" I hope you were at least given some things to reflect on to understand that YOUR own life matters. You matter to each of us, and I hope you will never forget that. Let me close with the words John wrote in his personal letter to his dear friend Gaius. "I have

much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face-to-face. To that, I will add an Amen.