

## What's Gotten Into You...An Embrace!

Mark 11:20-26

April 14, 2019

There is a big difference between a handshake and an embrace!  
I definitely prefer a hug from my wife over a handshake!

I have a brother-in-law, by the name of Art, who definitely is a hugger. Whenever we get together for some family time I will go to extend my hand to him and he will push it away and say, "What are you doing? Give me a hug brother!" He is like hugging a big bear!

It has now become a game for me. I know he wants the hug but I will intentionally begin with the hand extended to get his response of, "What are you doing? Give me a hug brother!"

The hug reminds me that we are family, we are friends, we are more than a handshake! Our relationship of love and commitment to one another goes beyond a simple handshake.

Our family is a hugging family! Handshakes don't work!

I love watching scenes of reunions. You know the kind where a family member has been away for a while and the couple is reunited. They go running towards each other, or at least speed walking, and when they meet they give each other an embrace that is not just for a second or two. It is a held embrace of love!

Imagine that same scene. Maybe its a military family member returning home from a long deployment. The family is running towards each other. All of a sudden the military member stops 3 feet away and salutes his/her family. There is no embrace, not even a handshake! I would imagine that family member would get demoted real quick. I don't think the family would let the person get by with a salute. They would mob him/her with hugs of affection and joy!

Who do you embrace in your life? Who do you simply extend a handshake to?

What about God?  
Embrace or handshake?

Today we walk with Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday! We see the excitement. We hear the shouts of "Hosanna...save us King!"

Oh my it seems like such a great reunion of embraces!  
What has gotten into the people who waived the palm branches and threw their coats on the street as Jesus rode by on a donkey?  
An embrace or a handshake?  
At a glance it seems like an embrace of love.

Oh what difference a day can make.  
I want us to stay with Jesus and walk with him the next couple of days after this Palm Sunday celebration.  
What a difference a day can make.  
What a difference a handshake can make instead of an embrace!

Jesus got up the next morning and was making his way back into Jerusalem from Bethany. It was about a mile and a half hike. Jesus was hungry. He sees off in the distance a fig tree that has leaves on it. He goes looking for some figs to eat. NONE! Jesus curses the tree so that it will not bear fruit any more.

What's up with this reaction...sort of like a pastor we know throwing his cross necklace at someone wanting something to eat!!!

What's gotten into him?

Definitely it was not an embracing of the fig-less fig tree.

Many believe that this was not an actual thoughtless action on Jesus' part. Jesus did not let his hunger get the best of him. Many believe it was an acted out parable of his anger at religion without substance. Looks without fruit. He had walked around the holy city the day before and perhaps this was a lesson about what he observed during the Passover festival and the temple worship...a handshake not an embrace.

Just as that fig tree looked good from a distance, healthy leaves on a healthy looking tree. But upon a closer examination there was no fruit. It was useless as fruitless. Uselessness invites disaster. A promise without fulfillment was frustrating to Jesus.

I saw a friend of the church walk by a week ago. He waived. I waived my hand at him like don't bother. He has promised over and over to be in church. A promise without fulfillment. I reminded him Easter was coming. He said he would do his best to get here. He said, "At least one day a year is better than none...right?" I told him, "No!"

So too did the people look spiritual by waving palm branches at Jesus and offering their sacrifices in the temple...but upon closer observation they were not living out the faith. They had their one day a year of coming to the temple. To them one day was better than none...right? I don't think Jesus agreed. Profession without practice is condemned by Jesus.

They were giving God a handshake instead of an embrace.

What is God seeing in you?

Does He see a good, looking the part religious person on this day of worship?

Does He walk with you the next day or so and discover that there is no fruit of faith on your tree of life?

Are you greeting him with a handshake instead of an embrace?

Let's keep walking with Jesus back to Jerusalem.  
We follow him to the temple and he certainly is not welcoming the people with neither a handshake nor an embrace!  
He starts throwing over tables and running the vendors and merchants out of the outer courts of the temple.  
What a difference a day can make.  
What a difference a handshake can make instead of an embrace!

What was Jesus doing?

He was angry at the exploitation of prices on the poor. Temple taxes and the price for sacrificial animals were exploited. Supply and demand! Jesus lashed out at the exploitation the rich were making on the poor.

He was also mad at the religious people preventing the simple people from coming in the temple to worship God.

The temple was to be a place of prayer and worship and not a market place of thieves. (Isaiah 56:7)

The people were doing a religious disservice and injustice! They were giving God the handshake in the temple instead of an embrace of worship and prayer.

What do we bring to God when we come to this temple? A handshake of showing up and offering a small token of appreciation. Or do we come with humble hearts of passion and embrace His love and grace?

The next day Jesus and the disciples were walking back to Jerusalem.

What a difference a day can make.

They walked the same path that led them by the fig tree He had cursed the day before. The tree was withered to the roots... shriveled to a stick. Useless!

Evidently the disciples didn't get the point of the parable and so Jesus goes into his emphasis on embracing a God life.

Jesus called his disciple to an embrace and not a handshake.  
This embrace was that of a God life prayer.  
Jesus used a common phrase of the day and time to get them to see the difference between a handshake prayer and an embracing prayer.

Jesus called the disciples to "mountain removing" prayers.  
"Removing a mountain" was a common expression for describing a situation that was virtually impossible. "Removing mountain prayers" meant removing the difficulties of life by taking the difficulties to God. It is a prayer that embraces faith and expectation.

A prayer of embrace is ready to accept God's power and guidance through the struggles of our daily lives.

A handshake prayer is a fruitless formality that really doesn't expect God to do much.

The real mountain in prayer is ourselves...our pride and ego.

We try to remove the difficulties on our own. We waive a palm branch and try to say the "hosannas" but we are not willing to embrace the cross of Jesus and die to self. (Galatians 2:20)

Prayer is embracing God life more and more so our will aligns with His. The more we embrace God the more our will lines up with His. Prayer expresses our desires but embraces God's will.

Jesus reminded the disciples, ***"Embrace this God life. Really embrace it and nothing will be too much for you."*** (Mark 11:22 MSG)

What do we offer to God? A prayer and a handshake or a prayer and an embrace?

Prayer without faith is a handshake.

Prayers without seeking forgiveness from someone is a handshake.

Prayer with faith is an embrace.

Prayer with forgiveness is an embrace.

Prayer with a denial of self is an embrace of grace in Jesus.

Jesus was emphasizing what Moses and Joshua had given to the people of God in the Old Testament.

Joshua reminded the people of Israel, after they had conquered the kings in the promised land, of the "embrace God life." The embrace God life looks like this:

***"Love God, your God,  
walk in all His ways,  
do what He's commanded,  
EMBRACE HIM,  
serve Him with everything you are and have."***

(Joshua 22:5 Message bible)

Did you hear those action words? Did you hear those "embrace God life" words?

Love...walk...do...EMBRACE...serve!

These words are more than a handshake of shouting "hosanna!"

These are words that are willing to Embrace the cross!

Embrace God life is a life of obedience out of love.

What happens when we come to God with an embrace?

We bear fruit!!!!

Here is how the Apostle Paul described this fruit bearing embrace of God's Holy Spirit:

***"But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard---things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely."*** (Galatians 5:22-23 Message bible)

Did you recognize any of those fruits of faith hanging on the branches of your life?

If Jesus were to walk up to you would he see the embrace God life fruit? Or would He be upset to only find a fruitless handshake faith?

It is easy to shout a religious phrase in a handshake.

Jesus comes to us and desires to say, "What are you doing? Give me a hug!"

Are you offering God a self-seeking handshake or are you seeking an embrace of love and grace?

What's gotten into you? A handshake or an embrace?