

Sermon: June 8, 2008

**“Akmal and Q”**

*“Come, let us return to the Lord ... he will heal us and bind us up ...  
after two days, he will revive us ... on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, he will raise us up ...  
his appearing is as sure as the dawn ...”*

Ah, yes ---- the Lord does appear in lots of different ways.

I walk into my office the other day ... and Debbie gives me a message: “This person called ... he wants to talk to you about your latest sermon in the Prairie newspaper ...”

Red flag. Alarm. Whenever I get a call like this ... I know it’s not from one of my “fans.”

So, on my way to Quinton’s school ... where these 1<sup>st</sup> graders have been reading to me all year long ...

I return the call. It wasn’t a “pretty” conversation. Basically ... he accused me of not being a Christian ... of not understanding salvation ... of not seeing the Bible as the Word of God ... and not accepting Jesus as my personal savior. Other than this ... he thinks I’m a great guy!@!!

So, I get to the classroom. The kids are anxious to read their self-created stories to us adults.

My first reader is AKMAL. With a name like Akmal ... well, you know he isn’t a “fellow Swede”!! Akmal has a beautiful dark complexion ... his round eyes speak of goodness, grace, and pride. Meanwhile ...

I glance back at Quinton ... trying to pick-up on how he is doing with his story.

All these innocent souls in the classroom ----- black, brown, white, pink ...their creativity, their pride, their families.. I think of the words in the first lesson for today:

*“Come, let us return to the Lord ... he heals us and revives us ...he will raise us up ...  
his appearing is as sure as the dawn.”*

I get so sad and disturbed when people use religion to drive a wedge between people who are different.

Differences in religion ----- they never bother me.

In fact, they often inspire me ---- to learn, to discover more about the human family.

Differences in religion never bothered Jesus.

He reached out ... he crossed the tracks. Even in the gospel for today ... the so-called “religious” Pharisees are upset because Jesus is eating with tax collectors and sinners.

What bothers me ----- not differences in religion ... but differences in conduct ... and spirit ... and the way we treat people. Is AKMAL any less worthy of salvation or goodness or heaven or grace than Quinton? ...

just because he and his family practice a different religion????

He is a child. He is God’s child. He is beautiful, creative, and proud.

I want to tell this gentleman who called me ... who claims to know the truth ... who claims to have all the answers ... (and, by the way ---- when we think we have all the answers ... this is when we have no answers) ----- I want him to hear the invitation and power of God’s word:

*“Come, let us return to the Lord ... he will heal us, revive us, raise us up ... his appearing  
will be as sure as the dawn.”*

God’s message is clear: he is here, he lifts us up.

He appears in the eyes and hearts of all people ... wherever gentleness and goodness prevail.

When we are divisive ... when we put ourselves first ...when we pretend we are more deserving than others ... you can call that kind of religion by any name you want ----- but it’s not about Jesus.

In my continuing quest to act like an older adult ... I listen constantly to WGN talk radio. John Williams has a segment on his Saturday morning show called ---- “The bright side of life.”

It's fun. People are invited to call in and share a slice of life bringing them joy ----- your daughter's first hit in a softball game ... grandma's birthday ... a reconciliation with someone in your family.

Yesterday a gentleman calls in. He has just been to the local grocery store and obviously has been touched by something. As he was checking out ... a senior citizen was behind him. A bit frail ... looked like someone who is getting by on limited income. Behind the senior citizen is a soldier ... in uniform ... just back from Iraq ... and he is proudly carrying 2 dozen roses ----- on his way to see his girl friend.

The senior citizen looks at the cashier ... then looks back at the soldier ... then tells the cashier:

*"Please ring up the roses ... I'm paying for them."*

The caller is in tears.

So ... what religion is this senior citizen?

What religion is the soldier?

What religion is the guy who is telling the story?

What religion is John Williams?

I don't know.

I don't care.

What matters ... as always ... is your heart.

We live in tumultuous times.

It seems like the strong winds, the rain, the storms ----- they are a reflection of the "extremes" in which we live everyday. From the violence in our city ... to the price of gas ... the divisions between us ... the fears about where our country & world are headed ...

In the midst of all this:

*The Quintons and Akmals of our world need to be friends!*

*Religion needs to be our gentle partner.*

*We need Jesus' face to shine in senior citizens & veterans ... and in you & me!!*

Once in a while ----- we need to celebrate the bright side of life.

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