

Sermon: October 5, 2008

“Good Temples”

I stop by the am/pm store early this morning for the Sun-Times. Not there yet. As I walk out ... the infamous mini-van full of the Sunday papers pulls up. You folks who deliver the weekend papers to am/pm's and White Hen's ----- you are a special lot. You haul-around those stacks of papers ... you've been up half the night. You have red duck-tape on your tail-lights ... the rear axel is almost dragging on the pavement.

The guy comes up to me ... “looking for the paper?”

“Yes,” I respond. “Which one?” “The Sun-Times.”

He goes back to his car ... grabs a Sun-Times ... hands it to me: THIS ONE IS ON ME!

My guess is ... this delivery guy doesn't have much of a 401K. I'm not sure if the debates or CNN is on his daily agenda. He's a “working stiff” --- like me. I'm a stranger ... only one person ... but in the darkness of the early morning ---- HE IS KIND, SPONTANEOUSLY KIND!!

He exemplifies the AMERICA I know and love.

People working. People trying. People not being “too busy” to share a small un-noticed act of kindness. America is about the “moments” of life. It's about common-ordinary people. It's the butcher, the baker, the candle-stick maker. The short-order cook, the brilliant surgeon, the night nurse, the cleaning lady, the parking attendant, the grave-digger, the preacher, the custodian ----- all coming together.

We can debate all we want. We can campaign and smear someone else 'til the cows come home. We can watch all the “talking heads” on CNN & MSNBC & FOX all we want ...and I do!!

We can strategize, spend millions on tv adds ... trying to prove who should lead our great nation.

Yes ---- what happens the next 30 days is important, culminating with the November election.

BUT ----- *the very soul of this country* too often gets lost.

The soul of our country is the strength, the courage, the work ethic, and the ultimate decency of the common-ordinary person ... who does what he/she can to make their “little corner of the kingdom” a bit kinder & gentler.

The same is true for religion ... which has too often become a game people play.

WHAT IS RELIGION???? ... THE GOOD KIND?????

- *A college student from Eastern Illinois ... calling the church ... to make sure his friend --- who has been diagnosed with cancer --- is on our prayer list.
- *It's a school teacher and golf pro ... standing by their little new-born daughter ... whose physical heart is fragile, but whose spirit fills this room today.
- *It's standing beside your daughter ... who is trying “to find herself” in a world that is too often cruel and nasty to those who are unique and different.
- *It's a family looking for a church home ... walking through our doors ... convinced that people really don't care about what they're going through.

RELIGION IS ABOUT LIFE ... IT'S ABOUT THE SOUL.

Religion cannot afford to be phony or shallow ... it has to stop playing games with peoples' feelings and guilt.

Religion --- like our country --- needs to re-discover the power and beauty of ordinary people ... who get up everyday and try to carve out a path of hope in an often confusing world.

If our religion doesn't do this ... then we are not the “body of Christ” we are called to be.

It's crazy ...but much of today's religion teaches us to be afraid of other religions.

Not good. Because fear leads to anger ... anger leads to prejudice ... and prejudice can lead to terror and destruction. This is why JESUS isn't about religion ... *Jesus is about your heart.*

I'm reading a book the other day ... and I come across these words from the Dali Lama.

What an interesting guy. He wears glasses like mine ... a simple robe ... shoes and socks. He comes into town, sits down, crosses his legs ----- and 10,000 people show up!@! Why can't I do this?

Hey, I'm just jealous!! Here are his words:

***This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples:
no need for complicated philosophy.***

Our own brain ... our own heart is our temple.

This philosophy is KINDNESS.

Beautiful words. So simple and powerful.

Yes ... in many ways ... our religion has become too complicated.

Often our temples become monuments to ourselves ... instead of places of humble worship.

The other day I go to a small Catholic school in Addison ... in search of truth!@!!

Actually, I went to visit a lunch lady ... who also doubles as my wife Jude's sister. She and her family lost everything in their home during the recent flooding. I went to share a "little something" from our church's love bucket. As I sat with Debbie at the table ... another lunch lady walks in ... her 16 year old son is living with cancer. Then another lunch lady walks in ... her nephew needs our prayers.

I told her they would be "Lutheran prayers" ... and she says ----- "Hey, we'll take anything we can get!!"

Then I went and had a prayer with Gail and Andy and Craig and Linda and little Drew.

Yesterday I met Bob Gename and our youth-group kids ... as they are help to build a home in Riverdale for a single mom and her son. I met the mom ... she gave us a "tour" ----- proudly showing where the kitchen will be and her son's first ever "very own room." It's almost like she's afraid to dream this will be "her own" some day.

Well ---- she is coming to our church in a couple weeks ... on her son's birthday ...

And we've already ordered a cake!!

I came back here.

I walk out back ... then I sit down and say a "little prayer" in our sanctuary.

I think of those words ----- "there is no need for temples."

True ... I guess.

I'm just glad this "humble temple" is here.

A lady in Addison is glad it's here, too.

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