

Sermon: September 28, 2008
“Don’t let the creeps take over!!”

What do you do? ... where do you turn? ... when your life is a “train wreck”??

You thought your retirement was secure ... but you are not so sure anymore?

You thought you had a plan for your life ... but your blueprint didn’t include living with cancer or taking care of your dad with Alzheimer’s.

You liked your job ... you did it well. Then they found out about a conviction for using marijuana that happened 25 years ago ... when you were 19 ... something for which you “paid the price” ... and they fired you on the spot. But what about now? ... it’s over ... it’s history ... I’m a good man!!

You’ve always taken pride in having some semblance of control in your life. Maybe like me ----- you live conservatively ... you love liberally. But now you are scared ... you are nervous ... and this isn’t like you!! So, what happens in times like this???? We can easily become afraid to share what we have and who we are. We are afraid to give ... weary of taking risks ... we revert back into ourselves ... we don’t reach-out.

I don’t know about you ... but ----- *I long to be inspired.*

I LOVE STORIES ABOUT HOPE AND PROMISE. I LOVE STORIES about famous people who sign autographs for free. People like Paul Newman ... we will miss him!! ... who make lots of money and give lots of money back. I love the story about the amputee who finishes the marathon ... about the person dying from cancer, who lectures his class about LIVING.

I love stories about accomplished musicians who play music for free in the hallways of children’s hospitals ... about the guy who has worked at St. Coletta’s for 25 years, and makes wedding cakes on the side to make ends meet. I love artists who share their work with people who can’t afford it ... and teachers who have taught for 40 years, and are still as fresh & creative as they were 35 years ago. I love people with lots of money ... who share lots of money ... with lots of people and causes who need money!@!!

How about the kid who does her homework ... knowing she won’t be alive when her report card comes out!!

Or the young man who eats lunch everyday with the “nerd” nobody wants to hang with.

The single parent of 3 young kids ... working two jobs ... sings in the choir ... and still makes time to volunteer at the soup kitchen.

I LOVE PASSION.

I LOVE GOODNESS.

I love a good speech by someone I can trust and believe in.

I love sweaty-grey-t-shirts and dirty hands ... and kids laughing because a pumpkin looks funny.

I’m inspired and humbled by a man from our own church ... when I call and ask ----- “how much do I owe you for all this?” NOTHING, he says. Well ... maybe I’ll throw in a “free baptism” down the road.

I’m tired of crooks & criminals & oily politicians getting all the headlines.

I’m tired of people who betray us and seek to destroy us.

I’m tired of kids being hurt and the elderly being taking advantage of.

Heck ----- I’m tired of being tired ... tired of being cynical ... I’m tired of being afraid to celebrate the goodness and power of the human spirit.

ENTER THE GOSPEL FOR TODAY ... about 2 sons: the smooth-talker and the sinner.

The father asks the one son to help work the vineyard. The son says “yes” ... but has no intention of working.

He just says what he thinks his father wants to hear.

When the other son is asked ... he immediately says “no.” Kind-of like when my dad used to ask me to mow the lawn ... my first selfish response is not to do it. But then ... I realize the error of my ways ... like the 2nd son. I do it ... because I love my dad ... and it’s the right thing to do!!

Jesus has a “little edge” to him this morning. Why? ----- because most “religious types” are like the first son.
They say all the “right things” ... but they don’t mean it.

So, Jesus says to those who will listen ----- *It’s the tax-collectors, sinners, and prostitutes who are coming into my kingdom. Why? ... because they are REAL!! Yes, they are sinners ... but they believe in me from inside their hearts. They are human, and willing to change!!*

We live in tumultuous times.

War ... money (or lack thereof) ... politics ... throw in a little “bad religion” ... not to mention the personal things each of you has to face each day.

Once in a while ... we need to gather ... like we are today ... and affirm & celebrate WHAT IS RIGHT, AND WHAT IS GOOD. In the words of the late morning host of WGN, Bob Collins:

“WE CANNOT LET THE CREEPS TAKE OVER!!”

It’s sinner like us ... sinners who work hard to take care of our families and friends ...
It’s sinners like us ---- who say “no” at first ... but then we look out at the vineyard ... we look at what needs to be done ... we look into our neighbor’s eyes ... we hear Jesus’ voice ...
and we say ----- *YES, I WILL DO IT!!*

Yes, there is a lot wrong ... there is also a lot RIGHT ...

I had one of our infamous “walk-in” baptisms yesterday.

As people are coming in ... I see him ---- JOHN.

I flash-back to 8 years ago. This 16-year-old kid comes in. He has messed-up ... needs community service.

I guess ... when it comes to messing-up and community service ... I have a big stamp on my forehead.

John comes in a couple times a week ... does his work.

But the story continues: he’s going to be a father ... a 16-year-old father. His girl-friend (the mom) is also 16.

His dad is going to kick him out of the house. Other than this ... how is your life going, John????

John comes into our church yesterday. He’s 24. His daughter is 7. He is happily married to his daughter’s mom. He is working full-time. And ----- they are living with his dad ... saving money to buy their own home.

Our love bucket may not be big ... but it has a heart ... and it makes a difference.

Tomorrow ... someone may ask me to do something.

My initial reaction could be to say “no” after all, what difference can I make?

Well --- only time will tell if what we do makes a difference.

But just maybe ----- it’s about time we started saying ***YES.***

Don Borling
All Saints Lutheran Church
13350 LaGrange Road
Orland Park, IL 60462
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www.allsaintsjoy.com allsaintsjoy@sbcglobal.net 708-448-2939