

Sermon: April 26, 2009
“Acts of random kindness ... and the youth!!”

Have you ever been the victim of an ARK???? ---- an “act of random kindness.”

You get to the toll booth ... give the cashier \$10 ----- “this is for the tolls of a few people behind me ... use the \$10 ‘til it runs out ...” Then quietly you look in your rear view mirror ... to see the reaction of those behind you.

You are at the grocery store counter ... your bill is \$18 ... you only have \$17 ... and the person behind you says ---- “Don’t worry ... I’ll take care of it.”

True story ... a gentleman has just paid his bill at the supermarket. He notices the gentleman behind him ... in his military uniform. He overhears the conversation: *I’ve just returned from Iraq ... these roses are for my fiancé, whom I haven’t seen in a year.*”

The gentleman who hears this ... well, he stops ... looks at the soldier and says ----
Thank for serving our country ... the roses are on me!!

Acts of random kindness. So, before we left for the youth retreat ... I went into my closet ... and filled 3 big bins with “left-overs” from this year’s children’s sermons ----- beanies, balls, eggs with money in them ... all kind of “love-bucket things.” I tell our kids ----- *This weekend ... every time we go to the dining hall ... you take some “stuff” from these buckets ... and give them away to anyone you see ----- other campers, the workers in the kitchen ... just SHARE THE LOVE!!*

It was fun ---- our kids loved it ... the recipients were surprised and happy.

There are lots of random acts of violence ... we read about them everyday. We take them for granted ... maybe we’re getting numb to them. From Afghanistan to Iraq to the streets of Tinley and Orland ----- innocent victims are hurt by violent random acts.

HOW ABOUT RANDOM ACTS OF GOODNESS AND GRACE? Should these not be what defines us??

Yesterday evening ... we sat around the “milk barn.” The only thing left of this little building is the foundation.

In the middle of the woods, we are ready to share the Lord’s Supper. I look at our kids: *We have been gathering in this milk barn for over 30 years. The youth who first sat here are now 45 years old.*

I look at Jenna ----- years ago, Jenna ... your dad was a junior high camper out here.

Now --- he’s home ... and you are here. Such history.

I’ve been reading a book ----- about a young girl, who has lost her way. On the surface, she has it all: good looks, musical and athletic ability, good grades, loving family.

But “inside” ----- you never know what’s going on. She is hurting ... spiritually, she’s lost.

Do you ever take time to look back? Some of the decisions you have made ... un-finished business ... maybe you ask: how would my life be different? What would have happened if he/she hadn’t come into my life?

Jude always puts it into perspective for me. She says:

Every moment we have lived ... each turn ... each person ... every encounter ----- it’s all part of what makes us who we are today!!

It’s so true. Yes, we can bury ourselves with regrets ... we can blame others and God and fate ... we can say “what if.” But ----- life is all about embracing the moment we are “in” and making the best of it.

Life is about being accountable for where we are in life ... and even “letting God in” to help us through.

I’m thinking about our youth on the retreat this weekend ---- 7th graders through high school.

Such a mix.

We have the young “dynamos” who seem to succeed at everything they touch.

We have the “new kid” ... who has never been on a youth event before ... and wonders if anyone will even talk to her. There’s the kid who bring a couple friends ... and the “friends” wonder: will the “church kids” include us?? We have the social butter-flies and the loners ... the athlete and the musician ... the A-students and the

ones who barely get by ... the young man who lives with autism everyday ... the junior in high school, who treats the younger kids with respect and goodness.

THEY ALL COME TOGETHER ... WHY? ----- *because this is a safe place.*
Here ... in this building ... on a youth retreat in Oregon, Illinois ---- *you don't have to pretend.*
You don't have to stand out ... you don't have to over-achieve ... you don't have to apologize.
YOU CAN JUST BE WHO YOU ARE.

Isn't this what Jesus teaches us? This is the gospel. Jesus goes into a crowd ... he goes into a leper colony ...
he visits the temple ... talks to a disgraced Jew ... and somehow;
he scoops each person up ... holds him in the palm of his hand ... and breathes new life and hope into each person's humanity. All the twists and turns ... all the successes and failures ----- they are part of who you are ... and it's ok.

Last night at camp ... it's time for dinner. It's been a long day ... we're all hungry ... and good news: chicken is on the menu. The food is served ... whoa!! ----- talk about a *random act of violence.*
Like someone said at the next table: *I'm sure this tasted good 3 days ago, when they cooked it!!*
I'm not sure I've ever had a bad meal ... until last night. The chicken was horrible ... I mean --- HORRIBLE!

The kids are hungry. On our way back to the cabins, a couple of our youth approach me:
Pastor Don ... we need a random act of kindness.
What might this be? ... I respond.
PIZZA!!

I explain to the kids that pizza is not in our budget ... it doesn't matter to them ---- "we'll help pay for it" ... they all chime in. So, I put a love-bucket on the porch ... "if any of you would like to contribute for pizza, just put your money in the bucket ---- a quarter, a dollar or two ... whatever you can."
One girl comes up ... opens her purse ... pours everything she has into the love bucket.
\$18 she puts in.
"That's too much ..." I tell her.
"It doesn't matter ... it's my mom's money!@!!"
Givers. Giving. It's what we teach!!

Later that night ... as we put out the campfire ... the program director of the camp approaches me.
Can I speak to you? (I'm nervous ... did she find my empty beer can???)
She speaks: *What is it about your kids ... from your church???*
What do you mean? ... I wonder.
She continues: *From the time they set foot on our property ... well, they just light this place up.*
They are different ... they are special.

In reality ... our kids are normal. What makes them special? ----- they don't let their differences divide them. Athletic ability, ACT scores, disabilities, the medications they are on, money ----- this weekend ... it just doesn't matter. What matters is their spirit. It's precisely their "ordinary-ness" that binds them together.
They use their "human ordinary-ness" to make a difference and to LIGHT UP THE WORLD.

Jesus was an ordinary man ... he had an ordinary job ... ordinary parents ... and he comes into our ordinary world. What makes him special? ----- he is chosen ... he is called ... by an un-ordinary God ... to share an extra-ordinary love.
Our youth ---- they are chosen, too. And ... so are you.