

Sermon: August 30, 2009

“Tom and Rev. Layla”

Do you ever spend time in an environment ... where others are just waiting for you to make a mistake???

Do you work in a place like this? ... does it happen in your family?

Well ---- it can happen anywhere ... even churches!!

There are some folks who absolutely feed on this ... they love others' mistakes ...
they can't wait to point them out.

Kind-of like the PHARISEES in Jesus' day. They walk around ... just waiting for Jesus and/or his followers to do something wrong. They didn't like it that Jesus was becoming so popular.

One day ----- the disciples forget to wash their hands before eating ... something I've done for over 60 years!! Now, according to Jewish law at that time ... if you don't wash before eating ... well, your hands are “defiled.” The Pharisees point this out to Jesus ... and ----- JESUS GETS A BIT

TESTY. I would have loved to be around and see this side of Jesus.

I can just see the veins on Jesus' forehead when he goes off on the Pharisees:

*“The prophet Isaiah warns us of people like you ----- you honor me with your lips,
you say all the right things ... but your hearts are far from me.”*

Then Jesus gets to the very heart of what true religion is:

“There is no way stuff on the outside can defile you. It's all about what's on the inside.

It's about your heart ... it's about your soul.

Religion ---- it's an inside job.”

This is precisely what we teach here.

Yes --- there are many customs when it comes to religion ----- rules, liturgies, songs ... some of us have titles ... we get noticed and recognized ...

But even in our “doing good” ... we are so tempted to build “little monuments” to ourselves.

We want to be noticed ... we need recognition ...

But ----- THIS IS NOT WHAT LIFE AND THE CHURCH SHOULD BE ABOUT!!

Life is about our heart ... our soul ... and the purity and simplicity of giving unto others.

I went to a cross-county meet the other day. The coach at Sandburg invited all the runners from the past 30 years ... to run the first-ever “alumni meet.”

I meet Tom. He is now 50 ... and is by far ... the best runner in this history of Sandburg High School and the state of Illinois. As a high school student ... he had a ridiculous number of state titles: 14!!

But ... in the conference ... the small group of schools around here ... he had very few titles.

The coach of Sandburg explains “why” to his young team.

You see ... cross country is a team sport. It's not about who is first ... it's about how the entire team finishes.

So, Tom ... would often “hang back” ... encourage all the other runners ... to make sure the TEAM did the very best it could. Tom knew ... even as a high school student ... that being #1 is about the team ... it's about what you're willing to sacrifice for someone else.

In a me-first world ...

in a world that often recognizes only those who finish first ...

there was a “kid” ... back in the 1970's ... who “GOT IT” ... who understood exactly what's important in life.

Heck ... I'm 60 ... and still trying “to get it.”

Our daughter Layla lives on a planet called LOS ANGELES.
One of Layla's friends is getting married ...and she asks Layla --- "will you do my wedding???"
Layla manages a bar ...she's not a minister!@!!
Layla responds: "I can't do that!@!!"

Wait a minute ... this is L.A.
Layla goes "on-line" ... gets a certificate ... that allows her to do weddings!@!!
Hey ---- would you like Layla to do your family wedding???? ...it'll be a moment you'll never forget!!

Layla has the rehearsal on Friday night ... then calls me on Saturday morning.
"Dad ... I had the rehearsal ... it started an hour late!!
Then --- it lasted an hour and a half ... yours only go 15 minutes ... what do I do today????
The wedding is in a couple hours."

I tell my daughter ...
*First of all ... just you being "you" ... you'll make it a nice wedding.
But there is one thing I do say ... maybe you can use it.
I say to the couple:*
***There is a lot in the world that is wrong ... there is a lot in this world that divides us ...
and this stuff gets most of our attention ...
but today ---- thanks to the 2 of you: WE ARE CELEBRATING EXACTLY WHAT
IS RIGHT WITH THE WORLD: and what is right is the two of you.
Your love ... your goodness ... the spirit bringing you together.***
Yes --- LOVE IS THE MOST POWERFUL GIFT IN THE WORLD ... AND WE REJOICE IN IT TODAY.

Yes, there is a lot wrong.
Yes, we are human.
Yes, we do crazy things for crazy reasons.
Whether it's a wedding in Los Angeles ... or what you will be doing two days from now ...
remember: "it's all about love."

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