

Sermon: December 13, 2009
“Turning points ... big and small”

Each of us has “turning points” in our lives. Something happens ... we have an experience ... and it can change us forever. We can talk about “God’s will” ... destiny ... God somehow causing things to happen ----- I’m not much into this kind-of talk.

And ... to be sure ... we all have those times when we look up and yell: “Lord, why me????”
Something can happen in a moment of time. A decision we make ... a sudden turn ... and our lives will never be the same again.

When I go to visit Julianna and her family ... I am reminded of turning points.
A car accident ... and their lives are forever changed.
The Christmas season in a re-hab center ----- an angel, a message, the hope of the Christ-child.
What matters most is what Christmas is all about.

A mom, dad, and family ... gathered around the tree. Then there is knock on the door. A representative of the military is there ... and they no what it means. Their son has been killed in the line of duty.

God’s will? ... no.

Destiny? ... no.

When it’s your time, it’s your time? ... no.

Life is a journey filled with imperfection and unpredictability.

I think of Jan and Randy Mitchell’s son ---- Scott ... number “44.” Scott grew up here. I think of him, his wife, his kids ... and once again ---- his cancer is back.

I think of the words we sang last Sunday: “Prepare the royal highway.” Each of us has a highway ... each of us has a path. We are all blessed with moments of joy, the pain of mistakes, the “alleluias” of victory, and having to clean up someone else’s mess or maybe our own.

In life --- all we have are the “moments” ... all we have is our path.

Too often we waste these moments with the ridiculous mixture of anger & jealousy & prejudice & trying to compete with everyone else.

Last Sunday we had representatives of Judaism and Islam come and talk to our kids.

It’s striking ... when you cut-away all the “trappings” of religion ... and let’s face it ----- religion is full of trappings. Full of ‘gunk” covering-up the true message.

Our basic principals are very similar: justice, dignity, one God, reaching out to the world.

The program had time for 3 speakers ... but, by the time the Jewish gentleman and the representative of Islam were done ----- well, the hour was over ...and I never spoke. So, I told our education director ... there is one principal we don’t have in common ... it’s called BREVITY!!

There is something strikingly – special about Jesus. It’s so unique, so transforming ... and easy to miss.

It’s called **HUMILITY**.

I’m stunned by how doggone humble Jesus is.

Maybe it’s the way he came into the world.

Maybe it’s the way he walked.

Maybe it’s his passion for those who are cast-aside.

Maybe it’s his quiet courage ... when people were out to destroy him.

Maybe it’s the way he talks when people tried to make him into some kind-of “god.”

We all have our opinions ... we all have our hot-buttons and prejudices.

Our journeys take us all over the place ... and our opinions are expressed in all kinds of settings ---- the local tap, our living rooms, coffee shops.

We have lots of views ... from Tiger Woods to the Bears to the Bulls to health-care to the kind of music our kids should listen to ... on most things ---- we'll never agree.

But ... in the middle of all this there is a MESSAGE.
There need to be spaces and places ... where we can come together,
where the barriers fall,
where goodness has power,
where a carpenter's sandals fuel our souls ...

Turning points ... they come in big and small packages.
Maybe as I think of a "small one" in my life ... you can think of one in yours.

As a young kid ... I loved Christmas. And, of course ----- Christmas was "all about me" ... and ... the bigger the better.

I remember one Christmas ... gathered around the tree: my brothers, parents, grandparents.

There's a big box with my name on it the biggest box in the room.

I open it ... and begin taking out the paper.

More paper ... lots of paper ... more paper ...

The box is almost empty ... my cup is "half-empty" ... a "minister is being born."

Finally ----- I get to the bottom of the big-almost-empty box ... and there is my present:

a bottle of ketchup!!

I'm sad ... a bit angry inside.

Then I see who it's from. My eyes connect with my grandpa. He smiles.

He's a Swedish grandpa ... so the words "I love you" are hardly spoken. But his smile ... his eyes:

THEY SAY IT ALL. This box is from him ... it's his idea ... and he knows me:

the kid who puts ketchup ON EVERYTHING!!

For a moment ... my grandpa is Santa Claus.

The gift. The spirit.

Whenever I begin to lose the spirit ...

When I don't think I have enough ...

When I think I need "more" ...

THERE IS A BIG BOX,

mostly empty

a little bottle of ketchup

*But the box ----- not big enough to hold a grandpa's love ...
never big enough to contain the love of a humble carpenter.*

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