

Sermon: December 6, 2009

“God’s messengers”

The other night I’m doing a bit of “religious channel surfing”

**There is the African-American preacher on the south-side ...

**The Baptist preacher in San Antonio, Texas ...

**Of course, the Roman Catholic channel ...

One thing that always stuns me is HOW CONVINCED each preacher is ... that he/she has the exact answer to one’s salvation. They claim to know God’ word ... they somehow know God’s will.

And then here ... today ... we have this thing called “UNITY SUNDAY” for our kids ... inviting representatives of other religions ... so our kids can be more “open” to other perspectives. Now these TV-preachers are trying to convince us these “other perspectives” aren’t worthy.

So, WHO IS RIGHT AROUND HERE?????

You have those Christians who think trees and Santa Claus are “pagan traditions” ... and have no business in church. There are those who are “offended” when the manger scene appears on public property ----- claiming it’s an offense to those of non-Christian traditions.

NO WONDER THE WORLD IS SUCH A MESS ... we can’t even step-back and enjoy other’s traditions. Then there is the “happy holidays” nonsense. Don’t you dare wish someone “Merry Christmas” if you work in a school ... for fear someone of another faith may sue you for being so “religious.”

Hey ... if you are Christian ... say “Merry Christmas.”

If you are Jewish ... say “Happy Hanukkah.”

If you are another faith ... share a greeting reflecting your tradition and beliefs.

LET US RELISH IN OUR DIVERSITY ... and not get “bound-up” in all the gunk dividing us.

I think of the first lesson for today:

“I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me.”

And then the gospel lesson:

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness ... prepare the way of the Lord ... one day all flesh shall see the salvation of our God.”

I wonder: **who are the messengers today???**

In your world ... where you live, work, and play ... who is it that gives you a glimpse of what’s really important in life??? And where is it that you go ----- to find the strength to face another day???

Isn’t this what Christmas is all about???

Jesus is not an exclusive club.

Christianity is not a religion feeding off the guilt of “not being good enough.” True Christianity doesn’t judge others who don’t believe as we do.

CHRISTIANITY ... ideally ... is a way of life, a way of living.

It’s how you look at your college roommate, when you discover he is a practicing Buddhist.

It’s how you treat the drug addict who wants a 2nd chance.

It’s how you deal with your family ... when someone makes a wrong turn, and your “blueprint for happiness” isn’t going the way you want.

CHRISTIANITY is the respect you show the server, who waits on you Friday night.

It’s how you treat your mechanic, and the clerk in aisle 3.

Yes ... true religion is about the common-ordinary moments of life.

We can say all the things and “accept Jesus” in a full auditorium but if we don’t “walk in Jesus’ sandals” ... and if common decency and goodness is something we leave behind ----

then our so-called “religion” is empty and worthless.

Each of us ... in our own way ... is a MESSENGER.
We aren't biblical prophets ... or a John the Baptist ... but how we live does matter.

These "little goofs" who gather up here for the kids' sermon ----- they want to believe in us!!

They lean on us ... they trust us.

Our own kids ... they may act like they HATE US ... and, at times, they do. And maybe we "hate" them back.

But ...ultimately: THEY WANT AND NEED TO BELIEVE IN US!!

So often, in life ... our heroes let us down. We want someone to be good ... and solid ...and noble.

Then we find out ----- they are as flawed (maybe more so) as we are.

Thinking about Jesus. Jesus didn't come into this world ... so life would be "all about him." He didn't come into our world to be "another God" ... Jesus loved and worshipped his God, as we do. Jesus didn't hug lepers & eat with sinners and meet outcast women at the well ... so they would "believe in him" or "idolize" him.

Jesus wants people ---- then and now --- to BELIEVE IN THEMSELVES.

He wants each of us to discover ... or re-discover ... the beauty of our humanity.

When you believe in yourself ... you don't have to destroy anyone else.

When you believe in yourself ... your religion doesn't have to be better than anyone else's.

When you believe in yourself ... well, you can begin *giving of yourself* to enrich the lives of others.

This is a crazy time of the year.

Cluttered, to be sure ... "busy" ... often stressful.

The "message of peace" gets buried in noise and chaos.

This morning I think of Walter ... a young lady named Julianna, and her fiancé Chris ...

I think of a crusty ol' trucker named Ray.

I think of Blair & David & Kristin & Jim.

Some of them won't be home for Christmas. Instead of gathering around a tree ... it will be another round of re-hab and struggling with a walker. For others ... it will be their first holiday without that special person whom they love.

In the middle of all this ----- each of us has a MESSAGE.

A child.

An angel.

And more messengers than we ever thought possible.

In the words of my favorite song ... which, I promise, we won't sing today:

"Here I am, Lord ... SEND ME!!!"

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