

Sermon: January 25, 2009

“The courage to change”

As you reflect on your humble journey through this world ... when decision time comes ... do you, for the most part, do what others think you should do? ... or ---- do you do what you know – in your heart – needs to be done??

There is a word in the gospel lesson that has haunted me for a long time ... *repent*.

Do you spend much time repenting? ... and ... what does it mean “to repent”????

John the Baptist says: *“The time is fulfilled ... the kingdom of God is near ... repent, and believe the good news!”*

The word “repent” ... well, its meaning is pretty basic. We all have shortcomings ... we make mistakes and fall short. So, “to repent” ----- it’s about asking for forgiveness. To be sure ... God does forgive us ... this is at the very core of Jesus’ message.

But ---- REPENTANCE goes much deeper than this.

Repentance is about change ... it’s about the courage to change ... it’s about the pain that’s often involved in making a change.

When I preach ... I’m always thinking about folks who have crossed my path during the week. Hopefully as we gather on Sunday ... there are people in your life ... whom you’re thinking about as we worship. You know the person I’m thinking about today.

This person could be you ... your daughter ... your sister ... your friend.

She is in a relationship ... as we all are. Each of us has a variety of relationships ---- family, boy friend, girl friend ... a relationship with our job, our church ... even our own soul.

She knows there is something wrong with the relationship. It has to change ... or it has to end ... she knows it. Many of you know what it’s like. You pray about it ... you think about it every moment of every day. You wish ... like Moses ... a burning bush would come your way ... and God’s voice would tell you what to do. You want God to call and say clearly: “This is my will for you.”

You realize ... like we all do ... the answer lies deep within your own soul.

Like our little friend Mattie Stepanek would say ---- we need to listen to our “heart-song.”

It’s your heart-song, and nobody else’s.

It’s your decision ... nobody else’s.

You are the one who has to live with your decision ... nobody can do it for you.

So, she ends the relationship ... but he won’t “let go.” There is the badgering ... the non-stop text-messages. Of course ---- you can easily “second – guess” yourself. Your soul ... your body ... your spirit ... your very being ----- are consumed by trying to make this decision.

The courage to make a change ... the “inner moxie” to make a decision, to end something, to dare to want something different for yourself ... the courage to be truly & genuinely yourself ... the inner desire to be free from that which binds you up ----- it’s not easy.

This can be one of the most difficult things for us to do.

The healthiest relationships are those grounded in mutual respect.

They are grounded in the capacity to listen ... and to care ... to reach out ... and to hold each other up.

It matters not ... if you are the manager, and she is the cook.

If you are the boyfriend, and she is your girlfriend.

If you are the boss ... and he is your administrative assistant.

If you’re the artist, and he is the customer.

If you are 16, and she is 15 ... or if you are 79, and he is 81.

If you are the daughter ...and he is your dad ...
RESPECT IS ALWAYS BORN OF LOVE ... AND LOVE IS BORN OF RESPECT.
Our shared spirit ... our home-grown & God-given dignity ---- these are the foundations
of deep and meaningful relationships.

When this is not there ... when you hunger for something more ...
when your cup is running dry, and you've given it your best shot then it's time to "repent."

"I am weak, Lord ... but thou art strong ..."

I ... and you ... we are all "sinners."

We all fall-short of the glory of God.

Yes ... when the relationship you are in is not right ... when it needs healing or even has to end ----
then it's time to "repent." It's time to step-back ... it's time to reach down into your soul and re-discover
your heartsong. We need to listen to it ... feel it ... follow it ... and – along the way – don't ever be afraid
to ask for help.

I've thought a lot about religion lately. I guess this is a good thing ... since it is my "job."

So often ----- religion and the church just GET IN THE WAY!!

Religion can make us feel inadequate ----- like we don't do enough ... we're never good enough.

Then ... when we go through a tough time ... instead of turning to our church ...

WE STAY AWAY!! This is crazy ... it's not good.

Many of us ... well ... we are afraid to be weak.

We don't want to cry ... at least, we don't want anyone to see us cry.

We don't want other to know ... that right now ... for me --- LIFE STINKS.

When you are weak ... this is precisely where you belong.

When life is unfair ... and you feel "picked-on" by God ... here, in church, is precisely where you belong.

*When you feel strong and blessed ... and you have a victory or two under your belt ... and you simply need
to say "thanks" ----- this is where you belong.*

When the tears are flowing, and you are not sure where to turn ----- this is where you need to be.

I don't know what "heaven" is like ... it'll be fun to see someday hopefully not today or tomorrow!) ...

But ---- in the meantime ... while we are here on this earth ...

the kingdom of God is here.

Not perfect.

Often not pretty.

But ... when we muster-up the courage to repent ... to change what needs to be changed ...
it's in these moments of grace & courage ... that "the kingdom is near to us."

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