

Sermon: June 28, 2009  
“The face of Jesus in DENNIS”

When you teach confirmation ... or Sunday School ... or you go to church camp ----- we are trying to help young people learn about God. How do we do it???

And it's not just about kids ... it's us “older folks,” too ... how do we learn???

You can try to explain “God” ‘til the cows come home ... listen to the “Lutheran Hour” ... the “Catholic Hour” ... listen to me preach or anyone else ...

At camp ----- we have movies and topics and classes ...

But ----- it's not ‘til you meet someone like DENNIS that you discover the “heart-and-soul” of real religion. Religion ----- it's not a game or a label ... it's not what you have on your church sign ... religion is not about what you say.

RELIGION ---- it's all about what you do ... and WHO YOU ARE!!

Each of us has a story. We live somewhere ... we do something.

We have a job ... or maybe we're looking for a job. We have our share of successes ... and also our share of failures. We have worked jobs and lost jobs. Some of us claim to have not enough time ... maybe we have too much time. We have money to spare .... or ----- maybe we don't know how to pay our bills tomorrow.

BUT ----- there is not one of us here ... in this humble room ... *who doesn't have something to give ... to make our world a better place.*

***We may not have much ... but we have SOMETHING!!***

Reading the paper the past few days ... a lot of “famous” people have left us ----- Michael Jackson, Fasrah Fawcett, Ed McMahon, John Calloway.

My guess is ----- years from now ... Dennis' name will never be among them.

Some of our confirmation kids met Dennis on Wednesday. He and his wife live in Racine, Wisconsin.

We all probably have a “Dennis” in our family.

A relatively big 70-year-old stomach ---- all bought and paid for.

Blue jeans that remind us ----- as we age ... maybe we shouldn't “bend-over” in public.

An earthy-simple man. Everyday ... he comes to the big ol' Salvation Army building ... opens up the gym so the neighborhood kids can come in and play. While he does this ----- his wife works at the used-clothing store across the street.

I told our kids at our Friday night worship ...

*I got a bit emotional today. I'm walking to the dorm after lunch ... and I'm thinking.*

*We are so preoccupied with ourselves ----- each of you is trying “to find your way” ... you have your cell phones and ipods ... you have more camps ahead of you this summer ... maybe you are missing a baseball game or two. And we adults ----- we have our schedules, our lesson plans, our agendas ...*

*Then I think of a guy like Dennis ----- what he does for kids who don't have much.*

*We were there on Wednesday ... he shares what he does ... we are a bit inspired ... we talk about what a great guy he is. But ----- what did we give back to him?????*

So, I go into my dorm room. I see my “Norm Van Lier” back-pack on my bed. Norm Van Lier would have loved Dennis ---- his kind-of guy!!

In my back-pack is some “love-bucket” money from our church ----- donations some of you gave me for camp, saying: “I'm sure you'll find a use for this!!” I combined this with part of the vast fortune Jude and I have amassed ... and, BINGO ---- I put \$175.25 into an envelope. I drive into Racine ... knock on the Salvation Army door ... hand a humble lady an envelope and ask her to make sure Dennis gets it.

“Who should I say it's from?” ... she wonders.

“It doesn't matter ... it's a gift.”

She smiles: "You know? ... Dennis has a couple things he wants to do for the kids ... but he always worries about where the money will come from."

I smile back: "Well, one less thing for him to worry about ..."

I think of our kids.

Yes, we quote the Bible ... we have classes and workshops ... we have schedules and make plans ... but ultimately ----- Jesus comes alive *in the faces of those who really care about God's children.*

Jesus comes alive in our walk ... in our talk ... in our shared voices.

Is it possible???? ----- that someone just might see Jesus in the way you walk? ...in the way you live? ... in a random act of kindness you share with a stranger????

In the way you live with cancer?

In how you treat your son or daughter?

In the smile on your face?

"Being a Christian" isn't all that difficult ... it's not complicated.

It's about digging deep ... and giving back.

It's about pennies and quarters ... an old gym, with an open door.

A guy named Dennis ... using your gifts, as humble as they may be.

We're at the beach.

There is a camp going on there ... for kids who are disabled.

Our kids are running to get into the water.

I have a couple kids with me ... I turn to them: "Before you go into the water with your friends, please take a moment to watch this ..."

Two counselors are with a young lady in a wheelchair.

They lift her out of her chair ... and gently carry her into the water.

The smile on the girl's face is big enough to light up the entire beach!!

I look at the two kids with me:

***"Remember this moment ... don't forget this picture.  
This is exactly WHERE JESUS LIVES."***

*Our kind-of text book ... the book of life!!*

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