

Sermon: June 7, 2009
“Self-worth and rubber chickens”

It’s amazing to me ... you, too? ... how much anger there is “out there” in the world.
So many people are ready to “pounce” on you ... if you come close to saying the wrong thing.

We see it in families.

We see it in the sports and entertainment worlds.

Neighborhoods and the work-place.

But ----- then you go to your kid’s school and meet the “gentle custodian.”

You are sitting at your dying mom’s bedside in the nursing home ... and you meet the cleaning lady ...
whose eyes and smile light-up your troubled world.

You go into a coffee shop ... and there is an elderly gentleman who needs someone to listen to his stories.

You walk into a “strange” church for the first time ... and you feel totally at home.

You try on one of Norm Van Lier’s sport-coats at the church garage sale ... and you flash-back to a Sunday
night years ago ... when he came to your church and spoke to the kids ----- free of charge ----- because one of
their friends had just died.

You get an e-mail from someone who just wants to say “thanks.”

You watch four gentlemen from our church ... donating their time to put in a new air-conditioning system ...
and they want nothing in return. Just a cold beer at the end of the day ... well, that’s something we
can deliver anytime!!

You know? ... there are lots of problems “out there.” If we choose to be angry and selfish ... yes, there is lots
of material. A daily diet of bitterness and cynicism ... well, there is plenty to go around.

But ... somehow, someday ... in the humble goodness of this place ... in a world where ordinary people do
extra-ordinary things ... in a world, where God’s spirit is as close as the air we breathe ----

WE ARE CALLED ----- to live each day ... with passion and hope.

We are called to take whatever resources we have ... however humble and small they may be ...
yes, we are called to use them and share them!

How do you measure a person’s worth?

How do you measure your own worth?

The gospel lesson this morning is about an aging Jew named Nicodemus.

He knows there is something special about Jesus and he asks: “What is your secret?”

Jesus responds ----- it’s about being “born again.”

I love these words of Jesus: *“The wind blows where it chooses. You hear it ... but you don’t know where it
comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the spirit.”*

Being “born again” is a part of the rhythm of life.

Every time you hear a new-born baby cry ... every time you are touched by an act of decency and kindness ...
every time you put someone else first, and not yourself ... every time you step back and listen to the heart-beat
of someone else ... every time you follow your heart and choose to live-out the goodness of what life is all
about ... every time you see someone hurt and you take the time to take some of that hurt upon yourself ...

YES ... THEN ... YOU ARE BORN AGAIN.

So, how do you measure a person’s worth????

Too often we measure our own worth by how “busy” we are ... by our job ... or what we own.
Sometimes ... just by the way we carry ourselves ... well, we have an over-inflated sense of how important
we are. We often do the same with our own kids and with people we know.

I can only share from my own experience.

MISTAKE #1

I run into someone I haven't seen for a long time.

"Hi, Marge ... what is Bob doing now????"

My question is followed by an awkward silence. Well ---- Bob isn't doing a lot right now. He lost his job ... is having trouble finding another one. Sometimes I can forget ----- Bob is more than his job. He is a man, a person ... his "worth" can't be measured by things external.

MISTAKE #2

I come up to a high school graduate.

"Congratulations on your graduation ... Anne, where are you going to college?"

Another awkward silence.

She tells me she's not going to college. She can't afford it. Since her dad is sick ... and her mom is working two jobs to pay the bills ... Amanda needs to stay home and work for a while.

When something like this happens ... I am "born again."

I'm forced to step back and be reminded ----- our dignity and self-worth ...

-it goes deeper than our job.

-it goes deeper than how much money we make.

-it's not about where we go to school or whether or not we go to school ...

OUR SELF WORTH & DIGNITY ... *is measured by the content of our character.*

It's a spirit.

It's soul driven.

On the one hand ... it's invisible. And yet ---- it's the most visible thing in the world.

It's about our walk ... our talk ... it's about our "daily journey" and how we choose to live it.

You know what an "important man" I am ... and the "important" things I do each day.

So ... it's our son's "Olympic day" at his school on Friday. I volunteer.

I spend two-and-a-half hours helping kindergarten thru 2nd graders launch rubber chickens into the air. My partner in this vital venture is another dad ----- 30 years old (younger than our oldest kids) ... chiseled ... Nike sun-glasses ... and much better at launching rubber ducks than me ...

I look at all these kids ----- 30 of them in line to LAUNCH A DUCK!@!!

Boy and girls ... brown, black, skinny, fat ... abled and dis-abled ... laughing, smiling ... not a prejudiced bone in their bodies ...

For some of these kids ... well, the purity will get tarnished as they get older. But ... a lot of it is up to us ... and what we teach them ... and what we leave behind for them.

For a few moments on a Friday morning ... I'm born again.

The wind blows. Where it goes ... where it lands ... where it comes from ... we don't know for sure.

We do know this ----- THE WIND IS FROM GOD.

And the hope????? it's inside each of these little kids ... it's inside of you and me, too.

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