

Sermon: March 29, 2009

“If ...”

I am reading an article in the Sun-Times about the cast from the musical “Jersey Boys.” Sherry Tomasello is a shut-in on the northwest side. She spends her life in a wheelchair ... confined to her home. And who visited her the other day? ----- the lead singers from “Jersey Boys.” Towards the end ... they asked the media to leave ... and they serenaded her with her favorite song: **“Sherry” ... how about that???**

I’m thinking to myself ---- this is what life is all about!
You have a gift ... you have the time ... there is “someone out there” who needs a boost ... and this all comes together in a “moment” she will never forget.

My first reaction is ----- IF I were famous like the “Jersey Boys” cast ... if I had that kind-of talent ... if I had their money ... I would love to help people like her!!

A bit later ... I’m thinking about what I just said. “If I were famous ... if ... if ... if ...”
What a cop-out!!

If I had the talent. I may not have much talent ... but I, like each of you, has some.
If I were famous ... well, most of us aren’t famous ... but to some people, we are important.
If I had the money ... ok, we don’t have a lot of money ... but we have resources.
If I had the time ----- come on!! ... we all have time.

The first lesson for today is about God’s covenant with his people ---- A NEW COVENANT.
The day is coming ... says the Lord ... *and I am sending you a new covenant. Not written on tablets of stone ...but this covenant will be written on your hearts.*
The word “IF” is not a part of this covenant. If you do this ... then I’ll do this ---- no more!!
This is a covenant of the spirit ... a covenant of action and goodness and grace.

Sure ---- we don’t sing like the Jersey Boys. We aren’t famous athletes or musicians. Our resources may not be as bountiful as theirs.

BUT ----- somewhere-out-there ... there is a young couple.
They work hard ... they get laid-off ... they go back to work. They do their best to pay the rent.
People ask: **WHY DON’T YOU GET MARRIED????** ... and their answer is always the same:
We can’t afford a wedding!!

Well ... here on the southwest side ... WE HAVE A CHURCH. A beautiful organ. A fine piano.
A moderately festive preacher. An open door ... strong coffee ... a “hall” with a fireplace.
We have a bunch of guys who like to cook ... we have men, women, and children who love to give.
We could put-on a festive-no-frills wedding for a couple who thinks ----- there is no way this can happen to me. Well ... it can happen.
I’m reminded of a “private wedding” I was scheduled to do on a Monday night ----- bride, groom, and their young child. My confirmation class was meeting that night.

Well ... the wedding turned-out to be not so private. Craig and Linda Nelson got the confirmation kids rolling.
They made bouquets ... a runner ... and attended the wedding.
The bride and groom couldn’t believe what was happening. The wedding cost them nothing ... the moment and memories are priceless.

You may be a mechanic with your own small shop. Somewhere ... there is a person who has to drive to work everyday. But his car won’t get him there.

What can you do? Tell him to bring his car to your shop after hours ... and just maybe ... you can give him and his car a new lease-on-life ... and he'll be reminded: I'M NOT IN THIS THING CALLED LIFE ALONE!!

There is no "if" in love ... there is no "if" in Jesus ... there is no "if" in giving.

True ----- we can't always do ... all we want to do.

And ... giving can hurt ... it can drag us down ... especially if we get no affirmation.

No one gave more than Jesus ... and towards the end ... it drained him. In the gospel this morning ... Jesus is tempted to ask God "to take this cup from me."

Jesus understands us ... he feels with us ... he's "been there" before us.

I talked to our friend Kieran Conway this week. He has spent his life giving and performing for others.

Combine that with his almost year-long battle with cancer ... he is drained.

"Don ..." he says ----- "this chemotherapy is kicking my ass!!"

I'm thinking, too, about our friend ----- Norm Van Lier.

He's a hero to many of us "old guys."

I met him for the first time in 1995. Somehow Norm found-out about the death of 16-year-old Adam Allsot.

Adam would be 31 years old now ... he died of muscular dystrophy at the age of 16 ... and the kids in our youth group were having trouble dealing with Adam's death.

Norm came here at no cost to talk to our kids. It was an awesome evening I'll never forget.

Norm loved kids. He couldn't pass a kid on the street without extending his loving hand.

He gave it all ----- to people, to his family, to the game he loved so well.

When Norm died unexpectedly ... all the "higher-ups" said all the right things.

As we worship this morning ... 4 guys from our church are moving stuff out of Norm's apartment.

No one else is there.

Norm died alone ... he died broke.

I think of those words: "Lord ... take this cup from me."

Yes, there is a new covenant.

It comes to us everyday.

It's written inside our hearts ... inside our souls.

No "if's" ... no "but's" ... just love ... and action ... and giving.

We may be tired ... we may leave this world with nothing ...

but when your legacy is about GIVING AND SHARING ...

something about you will never-ever die!!

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