

Sermon: November 1, 2009

“Giving is beautiful”

This morning I think about Army Spec. Jared Stanker ... killed Tuesday in Afghanistan ... from Evergreen Park ... graduate of Brother Rice High School. How can we thank him enough ... serving his country ... and giving his life. I think of his parents ----- so proud, I'm sure ... of what he stands for. But today ... they must feel empty ... losing their son.

I think of Michael Chambers ---- age 51. For the last 15 years ... he lives a homeless life ... surviving in Chicago's underworld. God only knows “why?” ... but one day a Salvation Army bus is going by ... he hops on the bus, goes to re-hab, and his life changes.

He is sober. He works. Has a humble apartment. And discovers ----- he is a grandpa!!

One our members drops by 8 bushel-baskets of pumpkins last night ... they are now bringing joy to the residents of a local nursing home.

A lady drives up in her pick-up truck yesterday ... just before we leave for the Ronald McDonald House ... it is chuck-full of boxes of supplies ... we had to take two more cars!!

Last Sunday I walk into my office. There is an envelope on my desk ... \$100 in cash ... no name ... just a note: *Pastor Don, this is for your kids' sermons!!*

And, speaking of the Ronald McDonald House ... a place where Gail and Andy spent 2 months of their lives ... before their baby daughter Drew entered eternal life in the arms of her grandpa ...

It was the first time they had been there together since Drew died ... the tears were flowing ...

How is it ----- on a Saturday morning ... on Halloween ... 35 kids from our church (your kids!!) go there to share a huge lunch and lots of love. There was so much love in that kitchen ... you just wanted to wrap it, put a bow on it, and never let it go!!

And every day this week you folks walked into our church ----- to share “stuff” for the parents who make the Ronald McDonald House their home. These folks are strangers ... trying to make sense out of life, with their kids fighting for their lives ... but here, in this place: *there are no strangers.*

WHY DO YOU DO ALL THIS????? ... because it is what Jesus teaches us to do!!

Jesus teaches us to take the moments of our lives --- the good, the bad, the in-between --- and use them as an opportunity to witness to the power & beauty of our spirit. And not just our spirit ... but the “Holy Spirit.”

--- when the checkbook is in negative territory ...

--- when the refrigerator is getting thin for the first time in your memory ...

--- when you begin to get scared about not having much to share over the holiday season ...

You need to remember: **YOU HAVE A LOT TO GIVE.**

We have ourselves ... our spirit ... our story.

We have our time ... our courage ... our guts and our persistence.

We have our passion, our goodness, and our heart-song.

GIVING IS A WAY OF LIFE. It's a way of looking at life.

I walk out back this morning. Squirrels are nibbling at the incredible buffet of pumpkins and gourds all around us. Instead of being annoyed ... I simply smile.

The mist is rising from the ground ... the sun is ready to say “hello” ... the bricks, all the names, the colorful trees.

I began to realize once again: *someday we'll all “return to the earth.”*

Someday my name might be on the bulletin insert. (At least I HOPE IT IS!!)

In the meantime ... for whatever time I have left ...

I'm not going to waste my time on angry pursuits.

No more wasting time on jealous journeys and doing things that only matter to me.

LIFE IS A LOVE BUCKET ... yes it is.

Terrorists, religious maniacs, people who live at the expense of others, angry e-mails ----- true, they hurt.

They cause pain.

But ... *if we can just light "one candle of goodness" each day ... THE WORLD ... at least our little corner of the world ... could be so much better!!*

No one may notice your candle of goodness ...

You may not hear the word "thank-you" ...

But --- this not why we DO GOOD STUFF.

I don't know how you define the word "beauty."

Each of us ... in our own way ... we have to deal with this thing we call OUR BODY.

Even in Jesus' day ... when people suffered physically ... when people were disfigured ... they were often pushed aside and left alone.

What did Jesus do????? ----- he reached-out ... he reached "inside their souls" ... and helped them discover THE REAL BEAUTY OF WHO THEY ARE!!

Let's be honest: it's can be hard when our body changes ... especially when those changes make us look different.

I'm sure it happens in your family: your kid gets a couple tattoos ... maybe a piercing or two ... the hair gets goofy and you worry about what grandma and grandpa are going to say.

Hey ---- let's worry about the important stuff!!

BEAUTY IS ABOUT THE SOUL.

When you radiate goodness ...

When you are a giver ...

When you are in touch with what is decent and kind

then you are beautiful.

And someday ... when our journey is over ...

there will be a candle on the altar for us.

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