

Sermon: December 5, 2010
"Marlina, No. 10 ... and branches"

My guess is ... most of us who walk in here on Sunday would call ourselves "Christians."

And ... a good number of us ... would even claim to be "Lutheran."

But most of all ----- we walk in here as HUMAN BEINGS. We've had maybe a good week, or a bad week. We come in here living with Alzheimer's ... possibly cancer. Our days are marked by a mixture of weariness and laughter. Some of us have money ... some of us are broke. We have people who love us ... and some who disappoint us. Our life is a "mixed bag" ... and we bring that "bag" into worship with us.

Just maybe ... when you enter this room ... you are hoping for a song or a few words in the prayer that will give you a boost for tomorrow. You're looking for an inspiring sermon (well, that's probably not going to happen!!) ... or a word of hope from someone ----- giving you the courage to face whatever comes your way.

Ultimately ... in life ... all we have is our HUMAN JOURNEY. For each of us ... our journey is unique.

Our life is a text book ... and people are watching.

How we handle the "gunk" coming our way ... how we handle moments of good fortune and times of hardship ... how we handle life's unexpected twists and turns ----- yes, it all can be a test.

Now ... we can go through life and complain ... I certainly do my share of this.

Our cup ---- we can see it as half-empty.

We can play this game of comparing ourselves to others ... and trying to please people who don't even like us. OR ----- we can show some class. We can look at life through the eyes of a humble carpenter ... we can walk with a bit of humility and grace ... and simply do the best we can.

I enjoy the words of the prophet Isaiah this morning ...

*"A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow from its roots ... the spirit of the Lord will rest upon him.
He shall not judge by what the eyes see or decide by what the ears hear.
RIGHTEOUSNESS SHALL BE THE BELT AROUND HIS WAIST."*

The roots are God's people. The stump is our heritage. THE BRANCH IS JESUS.

So, here is our challenge.

"The roots" are from where you and I come. The stump is how quick we are to dismiss the importance of the road we walk. And the BRANCH????? ----- it's you and me!!

When we choose to live as Jesus lived ... yes ---- we, too, are the branch!!

When we don't judge people by what's on the outside ... when we don't judge by what "other people" say ... when we have the courage to make decisions on the basis of what we know is RIGHT and not on what others think we should do ----- yes, then we inherit Jesus' branch ... and can be part of the goodness he brings into this world.

And there are certain people you think about ... and when you think of them ---- well, you feel a bit of hope.

This morning I'm thinking of Marlina ... from Heartland. Marlina died this week ---- only 7 years old. She spent her fragile life in bed ... couldn't talk ... spending so much time riding the fine line between this life and the next life. You look at someone like Marlina ... and some will wonder:

Why her, Lord? Is this your will? What is your plan????

Over the past 7 years ... some of your sons and daughters held her ... they talked to her ... they were touched by her. Not to mention the folks at Heartland ... loving her and taking care of her.

Marlina has roots!!

From those roots her branch grows ... as fragile as it has been.

And someday ... when I'm in traffic, and mad because I'm going to be late.

When my sump-pump goes out ... or my kid gets a "D" on a test ... or I make a mistake at work ...

and one of my “big ideas” fail ... and I act like a “half-empty” cup ...
I WILL THINK OF MARLINA ... her journey, her branch ...
and just maybe her spirit can help me be a bit more gentle, and gracious, and forgiving.

By the way ... I’m a White Sox fan. Not one of those “hate the Cubs” Sox fans ... just a fan.
There are times when the Sox and Cubs are playing at the same time ... both on the radio. I may be more
interested in what the Sox are doing ... but I will keep the radio on the Cubs station.

Why? ----- Ron Santo.

Ron Santo: the most unprepared, unpolished “color guy” in broadcasting history.

But ... there is “something about Ron.”

His competitiveness. His mistakes and lack of perfection. Wearing his emotions on his sleeve.
How badly he wanted to get into the Hall of Fame ... almost as much as my desire to get into the
“Lutheran Hall of Fame” ----- right!@!!

He lived with diabetes. Lost one leg ... then another.

Battling cancer. Never complaining ... never stopped going to work.

Ron’s most amazing gift: HIS HUMANITY.

Yes, our humanity ... it’s the most precious gift we have ... it’s the most fragile gift we have.

It’s the most divine ... and yet the most tattered of our gifts.

So often, in life ... I lose my perspective.

And then I realize MY PERSPECTIVE IS ALL I HAVE!!

Such is life ...

a little girl in her bed

a wounded warrior, bringing so much joy and hope to many

a stump

a branch

God gives us our roots.

The kind of branch we choose to be? ---- it’s up to us!!

**Don Borling
All Saints Lutheran Church
13350 LaGrange Road
Orland Park, IL 60462
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www.allsaintsjoy.com allsaintsjoy@sbcglobal.net 708-448-2939