

Sermon: February 14, 2010
“Your kids are amazing”

You are at a concert ... in an auditorium ... you have just witnessed a performance words can't describe: it is absolutely amazing. Afterwards ---- everyone stands, applauds ... you share the joy with all those around you.

You high-five and hug people you don't even know!@!!

There is a bond between all of you in the auditorium ... because each of you has shared something extraordinary. For just a moment ----- your religion, your color, your ethnic background, how much money you have or don't have ... it makes no difference.

The moment ... the experience: they bind you together.

This is religion. This is life. This is the way it all should be.

Maybe you've been to an athletic event ...and the same kind-of thing happens.

Last year ... Q was on a little league team. My guess is ----- he won't be doing this next year!@!! ... but it was an experience. It's about mid-way into the season ... and, as usual, Q gets into the game towards the end.

He swings ... with joy ... at the “aire” ...

And this time: the bat hits the ball ... he makes it to first base.

All the young-chiseled parents stand up ... they look at Jude and me: “FINALLY!@!!”

We all relish “in the moment.” The shared experience brings us together. Religion, bank accounts, ACT scores: for a while, they don't matter!! What matters is ---- YOU, THE EXPERIENCE.

This is why so much of religion today stinks. It's lost its soul. Religion has lost its heart ... somehow, the joy from whence it is supposed to come is gone.

Listen to these words from First Corinthians:

Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not insist on its own way.

If love doesn't insist on its own way ----- then why does religion??!@!!

You can go to church everyday ... say and believe all the “right” things ... but without love:

it just doesn't matter!!

The gospel lesson this morning also rocks!! Jesus is talking to his disciples shortly before his death:

“I am telling you all these things so MY JOY CAN BE INSIDE OF YOU!!

And, my commandment is this: LOVE ONE ANOTHER, AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.

You didn't choose me ... I CHOSE YOU. You are my friends. And what does a friend do???? ----- we lay our lives down for each other. Now: carry out my commandment ----- love one another!!

Want to read the Bible literally? ... then let's take this literally.

Do you get all “hung up” on someone having to “accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior”??? ... then listen to what Jesus says: YOU DON'T CHOOSE ME ... I CHOOSE YOU!!

Religion today has become very divisive. Sure ---- we have customs ... and rules ... and traditions. This is good ... we need them, and are nourished by them. But when what we do and what we believe and how we carry our religion ... when all this builds walls and creates barriers ----- then we are not followers of Jesus.

The other day I am visiting one of our members we hold hands, we pray. Some “deacon” from another church walks into the room ... he begins asking my friend “if he is assured of his salvation” “if he has accepted Jesus as his savior” ----- I AM STUNNED by this deacon's abrasiveness and ignorance.

Can you imagine Jesus doing this???

My Lordy!@!! ----- if you really “believe in Jesus” ... you don't go around “preaching” to others and making them feel guilty for not “being religious enough.”

What you do is ----- look inside their soul ... listen to their heartsong ... and rejoice in the goodness-of-spirit that brings you together.

Yesterday was a bit “whacko” around here. A couple comes into our church. They want to get married here. They have never been here before.

They look left as they enter ----- and a Tai Chi class is in the sanctuary. They couldn’t use the gym yesterday ... because some 75+ boy scouts are all over the place ... using our church for their weekend class. Tai Chi is good stuff ... but if you don’t know who they are ... you may wonder why the room of full of adults wearing black clothes ... making motions from the movie “Karate Kid.”

Our youth group is painting the basement walls ... and also, by default, painting the carpet. They run through the building ... with their hair and clothing dripping with blue paint.

This couple looks at me with nervous eyes: “Lots of stuff goes on around here, I guess.”

They sit in my office, and I ask them: “You guys aren’t very religious, are you???”

“No, we aren’t.”

“Good ... either am I ... now ----- let’s enjoy planning your wedding.”

You see? ----- our humanity is our bond.

The moments of our lives are the soil from which Jesus’ spirit speaks to us.

Religion: it’s not a label ... it’s a journey.

LIFE ... ultimately ... is not about being religious ... it’s about being SPIRITUAL. It’s about being true to ourselves and open to what the world and other people teach us.

There is something really special about the kids in our church. The “little ones” who gather up front during worship and put up with my goofy stories ... the kids in our Sunday School ... the youth who spend the day painting the basement and baking stuff for today.

The key???? ----- THEY LOVE EACH OTHER. They are as “different” as the day is long ... but here it just doesn’t matter. They aren’t abled or dis-abled ... kool or not-kool

They are who they are.

Monday night in confirmation ... I told the students the story of the “Christmas jar.” Lately our Christmas jar/love bucket has been busy and full ----- \$5000 for Haiti, \$1000 for Don Schroth’s family.

In fact ... Don’s grandson is in our confirmation class ... he told me it was ok “to tell the story.”

I share with the kids the jar in Jude’s and my home will never be the same again. All that loose change? --- it’ll be fun now to give it all away to those who need it more than we do!

Tuesday morning I get an e-mail from one of the confirmation students.

“Pastor Don ----- I love it when you and Craig tell stories ...” (Well, that’s what Craig and I do on Monday nights it’s story-telling time!!)

“Pastor Don ----- I really enjoyed the story about the Christmas jar. Someone I love very much is going through a tough time. Do you think ... sometime ... we can dedicate the CHRISTMAS JAR for her????”

I saw this girl yesterday ... as she was helping to paint the basement.

I look at her: *“The answer to your question is YES!!”*

Love is patient and kind ... and I tell you ... my commandment is this:

LOVE ONE ANOTHER ... AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.