

Sermon: February 27, 2010

“In search ...”

I consider myself to be a pretty “open” person ... but I know there are times when I’m too quick to JUDGE someone. I can easily let first impressions or a “too quick” reaction get in the way of really understanding someone else. It’s good to step back ... and learn “stuff” from folks who are different.

This morning I think of Gino. As I think of him ... maybe there is someone in your life who comes to mind. Gino is a high school senior ... he works here 3 days a week. He has “no clue” as to what the church is. You can tell ... except for working here ... he’s never set foot inside a church. But ----- he is curious. He is seeking ... he is in “search of meaning” ... as many of us are, in our own ways.

Gino meets our custodian ... Linda ... and wonders: why does she care so much about me?

He meets me ---- and God only knows what he thinks about that????@!!

He meets “Mr. Fix-it” ... maybe his grandpa’s age ... and “Mr. Fix-it” takes Gino under his caring wing.

He meets Debbie and Kathy ... and people like you, who drop by for coffee.

He meets 23-year-old Peter Cargill ... and it doesn’t take long for them to become friends.

One day I give Gino a staff t-shirt ----- yellow, festive, a “God loves you” with a smiley face on it. Gino gives me that look ----- “if you think I’ll wear something like this ... you gotta be kidding!!” I’m sure the t-shirt spent some time in the trunk of his car ... but then ... just a couple weeks ago ... Gino starts to wear it. I’m thinking: this humble place is starting to make a difference in his life!!

And then ... the other day ... Gino comes up to me, with Pete at his side:

Need any help cleaning up after the spaghetti dinner????? ----- you bet we do. By the time the dinner is over, most of the guys who have been here all day ... well, let’s say ... their best hours are behind them!!

I’m listening to a religious broadcast this morning not sure why ... it just makes me angry. There is way too much angry-judgmental religion out there. Preachers taking this gentle-Jewish carpenter ... and turning him into some kind of “ticket to salvation.” We often create our own brand of religion ... to justify our own prejudices towards people who are different --- not good!!

There are lots of “Ginos” out there: seeking, searching ... just daring you to love them are care about them.

They watch us ... they wonder ... what is this “church thing” all about???

Then they meet people like you: a 23-year old, a custodian, a Mr. Fix-it, a preacher, a gym full of “all God’s goofs” ... and they think to themselves ----- why do they care? ... what draws them here???

So, the night is over. The gym is empty ... the smell of spaghetti in the air ...

I’m walking out with Gino: WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT OUR DINNER, GINO????

He looks at me and smiles: *“It’s really fun to see old people having a good time!!”*

I realize ... WE STILL HAVE SOME WORK TO DO ON HIM!!

I’ve done a lot of reflecting lately ... it’s a good time to be doing this ... with Lent upon us.

Do you ever identify with Jesus? Today ... Jesus is so human, so real.

The Pharisees say to Jesus ----- “Herod is out to get you.” (As if Jesus doesn’t already know this ... and ---- like the Pharisees really care!@!!)

Jesus looks at the Pharisees ... he is incredibly INTENSE:

“You go tell that FOX ----- I am casting out demons, bringing healing to people ... and on the third day I will be ON MY WAY!! I have work to do!!”

Then, in one of the most moving scenes in the Bible ... Jesus looks over the city of Jerusalem, and cries out: *“How often I have wanted to gather all of you under my wings ... as a hen gathers her brood ... to protect you and keep you safe ... but you will not listen.”*

How about you? Don't you just want ... sometimes ... to gather all those you love ... give them shelter ... and protect them from the harshness of the world??!@!!

JESUS BRINGS A MESSAGE OF GOODNESS AND HOPE.

He brings a message of peace and forgiveness.

Jesus heals ... and cares ... and loves. He wants to protect us and keep us safe.

This is what HEARTLAND CHILDREN'S HOME does. Kids for whom life is cruel and unfair. Heartland gives them hope ... they give them rest ... and Heartland teaches them (without having to say a word): LIFE CAN BE GOOD ... and there are lots of people out there who, by nature, love and care!!

And ---- this is what we try to do here.

I realize more and more ... as I get older ... how "flawed" I am.

As a man ... as a pastor ... as a spouse and father ... as a human ----- I am flawed. I have so many shortcomings ... have made many mistakes ... there are lots of "wrong turns" in my history.

I wish I could take some of them back ... but: they are part of who I am today.

Wouldn't the world be so much better off ... if we could all understand how flawed we are???

It's ok. We all need God's grace and forgiveness ... along with the grace and forgiveness of each other.

In many ways ... our shared "imperfections" can bring us together ... they can help bind us together as God's 'imperfect-but-loving family.'

Speaking of "sinners" and the spaghetti dinner ... last night ---- we were a "temple full of sinners."

Afterwards ... a few of us are in the kitchen ---- talking about life, the church, and religion.

A couple of the folks in the kitchen had never been here before. They are very curious about what this place stands for ... what "kind of religion" we are.

As we leave ... our 26-year-old daughter puts her arm around one of the ladies.

"For over 20 years ... this church has taught me ----- the best kind of religion is getting up everyday, and doing whatever you can to be a good person."

I look at Jude.

She looks at me.

We both look at our daughter we are quietly proud.

Maybe someday ... Gino will be able to say the same thing.

Don Borling
All Saints Lutheran Church
13350 LaGrange Road
Orland Park, IL 60462
February 27, 2010

www.allsaintsjoy.com allsaintsjoy@sbcglobal.net 708-448-2939