

Sermon: February 7, 2010

“The living BIBLE”

So, the SOUTHTOWN newspaper has a feature called “the faces of faith” ... where they feature --- once a week --- some of the distinguished clergy in the area. This probably explains why I haven’t been in the paper!@!! But ... believe it or not ... I got “THE CALL” last week, and I was interviewed. A couple days later a photographer comes by for a picture.

Where should we take your picture?

I suggested ---- sitting at my desk with a cup of coffee ... no go.

How about by the fireplace ... over pizza and beer???? ... he wasn’t amused.

So, we come into the sanctuary ... he wants a picture of me by the altar ... “And, Reverend ... let’s get a Bible, and you can hold it ... and kind-of look-up ...”

I look at him ----- this isn’t me.

Is the Bible supposed to make me look more spiritual? ... more real? ... more like a minister?

I’m thinking: THE BIBLE IS NOT A TROPHY.

I don’t know how exactly to explain my feelings about the Bible. Every time I do ... I get these crazy e-mails, telling me how wrong I am.

I have very strong feelings about the Bible ... it’s a wonderful book.

Let’s say you have an “experience” ... something really impacting your life. You live it ... you get through it ... you are amazed at how much about yourself and your life you learn because of it.

Over time ... you look back on this experience ... you reflect, you wonder. As you share what you have gone through, you realize: GOD WAS THERE IN THOSE MOMENTS. You felt his presence, you heard his voice.

You begin talking about this, writing about it.

This is the Bible.

True, parts of the Bible don’t make any sense ... because, at times, we humans don’t make any sense.

Parts of the Bible are hard to understand ... because we can be hard to understand.

Parts of the Bible hit us right in the guts ... because this is precisely where God lives.

The Bible is our story ... it’s God’s story ... it’s a story about LIFE.

I have so many random thoughts this morning ... ok, what else is new?

One of the reasons I like the song “Here I am, Lord” so much ... well, it’s because of where it comes from. ISAIAH feels “called” to do something. He feels God’s presence ... but he tells God: *I am a man of unclean lips ... the people I live with ... they, too, are unclean ... Lord, I’m lost.*”

God is probably thinking ---- so, what else is new?? All people have unclean lips ... all people are “sinners” ... everyone falls short ... so, don’t use this as an excuse for not responding to my call!!

So, out of frustration, God says to Isaiah: **“Whom shall I send.”**

Isaiah looks into his own soul ... listens to his heart ...and finally declares:

“Here I am, Lord ... SEND ME!!”

God sends Isaiah into a world of “unclean lips.”

God sends you ... he sends me.

Life is not about “the guy down the block” doing the dirty work ... or about someone else doing it.

Life isn’t about looking at ourselves and thinking we have nothing to give.

Life is about you ... and me ... being honest about who we are ... and then going into the world ---- giving life our best shot and making a difference.

And, by the way ... *God did not stop speaking to the world once the Bible was published!!*

God didn’t speak to Isaiah and send his son into the world so we would have an interesting book to read.

These stories ----- they are our inspiration ... so we might be a *prophet unto someone else.*

The Bible needs to inspire us ... so we can take the goodness and gentleness of Jesus ... tuck it inside our hearts ... and be a LIGHT unto others.

You don't hold the Bible ... you live it.

You don't believe the Bible ... you believe in the God who is at the center of the Bible.

"God's word" isn't contained between the covers of a book ... it lives in the very essence of the goodness of the human spirit ----- it lives in you ... it lives in me.

Not perfectly ... not without flaw ... but it's there!!

We talk a lot about the "love bucket" around here ... maybe you get tired of hearing the words. We have "love buckets" all over the place.

Maybe you remember ... shortly after Christmas ... THE ETERNAL LIGHT was in honor of a "stranger" who left a "Christmas jar" at the door of one of our member's homes. In that jar ... was a pretty good "chunk of change" to help their daughter's family in a time of need.

I bet many of you have a jar at home ... where you put your spare change.

Maybe after a few months you count it ... you are surprised by how much is there ... and then you "fight" over whose money it really is!@!!

LIFE IS LIKE A JAR, isn't it?? Each day ... you try to give it your best ... and then at the end of the day ... you feel like a bunch of "loose and spare change." You throw your loose change into the jar ... Lord, it's all I have left ----- can you use it??? ... can you use me???

Are you excited about the Academy Award nominations? Does anyone know? ----- is "Rocky I" up for any awards??? My favorite movie of all time!!

Just like Rocky ... everyday ... we get into the ring. Life beats us up. We go down, we get back up. We go down again ... we're tempted to stay there ... but, by the grace of God, we go on!!

I remember my seminary professor telling me: *Don, you're soon to be a minister. You've learned a lot of stuff in seminary that you'll never use or need. Just remember ... in life, in the church: SURVIVAL IS VICTORY!!*

True, isn't it??? No matter what you do in life ----- to survive is to win!! Rocky survived ... we have survived ... how about you?? At the end of the day ... all we have is spare change. We throw it into the "jar of life" and somehow, somehow -----God uses it!!

Speaking of the "jar" ... the love bucket ...

He and his family have struggled for a long time ----- raising a family ... unemployment ... living with cancer for over a year ... his wife on a heart monitor. Their life ---- like a "spiritual Rocky I" ...

I visited him the other day. I didn't have a jar ... just an envelope.

On my way out ... I give it to his wife ----- "open this when you get home."

She did. Inside ----- \$1000 in cash.

They wonder: where did it come from?

The answer is simple ----- my friends: *it is from you.*

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