

Sermon: January 10, 2010

"Mentors"

I, of all people ... don't know what the "key to life" is. Maybe none of us know. Each day, I just try to "find my own way" through this maze called LIFE. We go to school, study, work, wonder ... we make lots of plans. Then something happens, and our blueprint is de-railed ... and we try to get back on track.

How many of you, in this humble room ... are doing something totally different than you thought you would have been doing 20 years ago???? For many of you --- your life has taken a totally different track than you ever thought possible.

How about a "slug" like me? Same job for 36 years!! And yet ----- 90% of what I do in my job is stuff for which I was never formally trained. So much of seminary had nothing to do with what I need to do to survive in this job each day!@!! Like my dad used to tell me ----- the most important education comes from the "school of hard knocks."

One of the hardest things for any of us is finding our "niche" in life. That little place where we "belong" and can make a difference. Obviously in life ----- we need to make enough money to survive. We gotta pay our bills and make a living. It's not easy, at times. My guess is ----- I'm a lot like many of you. If I lost my job tomorrow ... I would do almost anything to take care of my family. I don't care how common or ordinary work, in and of itself, is sacred. It's what we do to take care of those we love and those who depend on us. It's "frosting on the cake" when your work also brings you meaning and a sense of purpose. It's good to be able to say ----- *where I am now isn't perfect ... but for now, it's ok!!*

Good gospel lesson for this morning ---- Jesus' baptism. It's more than just about baptism ... it's about "being chosen." Over the years ... we have so "deified" Jesus ... so made Jesus into something we want him to be ----- well, we've lost touch with his incredible humanity. Think about it ... Jesus is 30 years old, and still living with his mom. Does this remind you of your family????? We do know he ran away for 3 days at the age of 12 ... and was found teaching in the temple.

But other than this ... his life is a mystery.

He must have had an "inkling" ... a sense of "being called" ----- knowing he had a special relationship to God. He had this ability to "make God come alive" for those who felt like they were on the "outside looking in."

BUT THEN HE HAD THIS MOMENT ... at the river Jordan. He hears a voice ... the spirit grabs him ...
"You are my son ... with you I am well pleased."

It doesn't matter if you are 4 or 84 ... we all need to hear this voice. Someone needs to grab us by the shoulder, look us in the eye, and say: *"Son, daughter, friend, partner, co-worker ----- I love you. I appreciate you. With you ... I AM WELL PLEASED."*

When was the last time you heard this from someone who loves you???

When was the last time you said this to someone you love???

If you don't hear these words ... if you are never made to feel this way ----- you can just wither up and spiritually die!@!! We need this affirmation ... and we NEED TO GIVE IT, TOO!!

It's been a tough week here at the humble temple.

I need "mentors" ... how about you?

I need people in my life ----- who make me feel young, and special, and needed. Those to whom we look up ... those who have lived life ... those who encourage us to be ourselves and move ahead.

When I returned from vacation ... I visited three people almost immediately. Within 48 hours ... they all died.

I mentioned to our "Thursday night" congregation: if you need pastoral assistance the balance of this week ... maybe you should call Craig. I'm not doing very well so far ... you may not want me showing up at your front door!!@!!

This morning I think of Walter ---- Bob Wisniowicz's dad.

Walter is the consummate CATHOLIC. Every day ... when I visited Walter ... his loyal wife Silvia was there ----- reading her prayer book and holding onto the Rosary. Bob kept telling me ----- "Don, I appreciate your visits, and my parents do, too.

But when my dad leaves this life ... YOU AIN'T GETTING THE FUNERAL. He's going to St. Mike's!!"

Walter reminds me of how important it is to have a foundation ... his foundation is his church.

Then there is Russ Hill. He died this week at the young age of 69. He lived with Alzheimer's for 10 years ... but you'd never know it. He and his family handled it with such courage and class. 43 years --- a member of the IBEW ... the electrician-union. Almost as powerful as my union!@!! 34 years with the same company. He and his wife Char of 49 years ... they began dating when they were 14 and 13 years old. A love affair that never ended. Russ --- another mentor ... a reminder of how important loyalty and love are in life!@!!

Then there is Charlie Samec ----- my favorite atheist. He died the other day at the age of 88. I remember doing his and Geri's wedding 16 years ago. When I did their wedding ... he looked at me ... and without having to say a word ----- it was like he dared me ever to get him to come back to church!! We had these amazing philosophical discussions about religion, God, and the state of the world.

A couple years later ... Charlie asked me: "Don, would it be ok if I started coming to church????
(I quietly said to myself ----- **YES!!!**)
I remember when Charlie said to me ----- "Don, I'm not sure I was ever baptized. Would it still be ok if I come up to receive Communion with Geri???"
I began to realize ----- For Charlie ... his religion was his honesty. His religion was his humanity ... and ultimately his spirit. At our senior lunches ... he always came into the kitchen ... looked us in the eyes and said ----- "Thanks so much for what all of you do to make us seniors feel special."

You see? ... with Charlie -----
*it's ok to doubt.
*it's ok to question.
*IT IS NEVER OK TO BE PHONY!!!

By the way, Charlie ... YOU WERE BAPTIZED!!
The river Jordan is your life.
It's in life ... you hear God's voice.
You know you were chosen ... you knew your place in life.
Yes ----- you were baptized ... "with the water of life itself."

Thanks ... Walter, and Russ, and Charlie ... thanks all you MENTORS out there.
You teach us: religion is about our walk ... it's about going to work everyday it's about being honest in our faith.
It's hearing God's voice ... in every step we take.

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