

Sermon: July 18, 2010

**“The t-shirt man”**

I love the story about Martha and Mary ----- the sisters.

Martha: hard-working, always busy, perfect house.

Mary: a bit flighty ... loves to talk and listen.

Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet ... hanging on every word ... while Martha gets dinner ready and is doing all the house-work. Martha complains to Jesus that Mary isn't doing anything to help.

Jesus responds: *“Martha ... you are distracted by so many things. Mary knows what's really important in life.”*

We can get so distracted. We run around doing stuff ... all kinds of chores ... so many self-imposed deadlines.

And ... in the midst of all this ... we easily lose sight of what's important and what's not.

Martha wants to make sure everything looks nice.

Mary knows this may be the only chance she has to listen personally to what Jesus has to say.

Are you ever surprised by what you are and where you are today????

Maybe it's a good kind-of surprise ... maybe your surprise is full of disappointments along the way.

I think of our graduating seniors ... trying to decide where to go to college and what to do with their lives.

There are many of us today who aren't doing anything close to what we thought we'd be doing.

I'm probably not one to talk ... since I've had the same “job” for 36 years.

However ... I remember back in my seminary days. Classes where our professors would ask: where do envision yourself in 10 years? ... what will life be like “in the parish”????

I knew nothing then about love-buckets and steak fry's ... moving tables and chairs every day for a different event. ... creating t-shirts and buying stuff at the dollar store.

How about you????? ----- ever think you'd be a teacher ... or a plumber ... selling real estate ... working aisle 3 at Walmart ... being unemployed or having to change careers to make ends meet???

**WE NEVER KNOW WHERE THE WORLD WILL TAKE US!!**

The gentleman I'm thinking about this morning ... when he was young ... did he ever say to himself:

“When I grow up ... I want to make and sell t-shirts!!”

You can tell a lot about a person ... in the way he/she walks ... or talks about his family.

Carter is so proud of his family. One of his kids is in a 12-step program ----- it's a good place to be when you are battling an addiction. Many of you know what it is like ----- it's so human, so humbling ... and life-changing!! Carter talks about his son's journey with such pride and grace.

Over the past 20 years ... Carter has made every t-shirt our church has ever worn.

He has a humble shop in Mokena ... kind-of like the “one room school house” of t-shirts.

Now ... Carter is not a “rich” man ----- in the material sense. In fact ... he celebrates his 68<sup>th</sup> birthday today ... and he still is working as hard as ever.

He comes over to the church the other day ... with two boxes of t-shirts. These are the annual “Heartland” t-shirts. For us, anyway ... it's a pretty big order: shirts for all our kids, and for those we visit next week.

He brings in the box.

Our routine is always the same. He puts the box down ... I open it ... I take out the top t-shirt and look at it ... Carter waits to see my reaction. I put the shirt back in the box ... take out the bill ... sit at my desk with a cup of coffee ... write out a check ... and he's off to his next stop.

This time, I open the box ... take out the shirt ... smile ... tell him how much I love the shirt ... but ----- I can't find the bill.

Carter gets really quiet.

There is no bill.

His eyes get a bit moist ... so do mine: He smiles: "Reverend ... I really believe in what you-all do at this church ... these t-shirts are on me!!"

I hug him. No words can express how I feel about this man and what he has done for us over the years.

You see? ----- Carter can't afford to do this!@!! ... yet: he does it.

Carter leaves ... and I come into the sanctuary here.

I look at the altar ... and the cross. I think about the bread and wine we'll share on Sunday ...

the love-bucket. I think about my dad, my life ... where I've been, where I'm going ...

I think about Martha ----- running all over, trying to make things perfect. And Mary ----- sitting at Jesus' feet, basking in the moment.

Most of all ----- I think about what it means to give.

You know? ... it's easy to give when it's convenient.

It's easy to give from what is left over.

**WE ARE BLESSED BY A GOD ----- *who gives it all.***

God is called by many names ... but the "name" doesn't matter. It's what is in our hearts that counts.

God gives us his very own SON.

And ... we see God in all kinds of places.

From 12-step programs to t-shirt shops to love-buckets ..... maybe even a humble place on LaGrange Road.

**GOD IS EXTRA-ORDINARY ... precisely because he lives in what is ordinary.**

What a humble man did the other day will never make the paper. An ordinary man ... with an ordinary gift. Yet ..... he shares from the very guts of who he is. He never gives what is left over ..... he gives of himself and of his craft.

Yes, God comes in all shapes and sizes.

And often ----- he uses ordinary folks like you and me.

This is when I want ***to be like Mary.***

Listening ... glued to the moment ... not distracted ...

I also know now why *I like t-shirts so much.*

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