

Sermon: July 25, 2010

“HOPE”

I know why I like the sunrise in the morning ----- whether it's at the church ... walking my dog in the forest preserve ... or standing on my front porch ...

THE SUNRISE reminds me of HOPE. Every morning ... the hope to get through another day.

Life is about HOPE. When you lose it ... when you lose that sense of anticipation and grace ... when you don't want to face another day and your “sense of purpose” is drained ----- well, it hurts.

I don't know exactly how to define hope. It's a feeling ... it's a spirit ... it's a way of living.

You can see it in a person's eyes ... hear it in their voice ... it exudes a kind-of energy.

You can be very sick ... and have hope.

You can be dying ... and have hope.

You can be rich or poor ... employed or unemployed ... young or old ... successful or “unsuccessful” ----- hope is something living in the very fiber of your being.

Someone may ask ----- what's the point of going to church? What's the point of being religious or spiritual?

Why believe in Jesus or study his word?

Well ----- Jesus is all about hope.

Whether you were a Jewish priest or a tax-collector ... dying of leprosy or a lost fisherman ...

JESUS BROUGHT HOPE TO WHOMEVER HE MET ALONG THE WAY.

Hope is an inner conviction that ----- *I matter!! My journey counts for something ...*

I am worth something ---- somewhere, to someone.

When you feel like you don't matter ... when you feel like ---- if your journey ended today ---- no one would care or notice ... well, this isn't good. It's gotta change.

WHY?????? ... *because it's not true.*

Your journey does matter. My journey matters.

And when our journey ends ... some people are going to miss us.

You see? ----- HOPE IS NOT ABOUT OUTCOMES. Hope is not about everything we want coming true. It's not about success or riches.

Hope is about your soul.

The gospel lesson has these words: “Ask, and it will be given. Seek, and you will find. Knock, the door will be opened.” Do you really believe this? We ask for lots of things.....and we don't get them. We seek.....and often we do not find it. How many doors have you knocked on that were never opened?????

But ... if what we are asking for is hope if what we seek is inner peace and purpose in life ... if we are knocking on the door of Jesus' heart then it's there ... we will get it ... the gift is ours.

By the way ----- I LOVE THE KIDS IN OUR CHURCH your kids!!

I know they're not perfect or without flaw. And besides ----- I don't live with them ... you do!!

I spent a week with 18 of your kids in Wisconsin at confirmation camp ... I just got back from Heartland with 12 of your kids. You know what is so “kool” about our kids ... I mean, YOUR KIDS?????

THEY WOULDN'T KNOW A DISABILITY IF IT HIT THEM IN THE FACE!!

Johnny has spent his life at Heartland ... he is now 9 years old. When most people talk about Johnny ... some of the first words out of their mouth is ----- “Johnny is autistic.”

Well ... not in the our kids' world.

Johnny is Johnny. Sure ---- autism will always be part of defining him. It will always be with him.

Johnny spends a lot of time “in his own little world” a world we may not be able to visit.

Lots of times ----- Johnny walks his way ... we walk ours. Johnny looks, and stares, and wonders ... and we wonder, too.

For the last 6 days ----- Johnny was about as autistic as I am Irish.

He ate with us ... laughed with us ... cried with us.

There is a big “kabuto” at Heartland ... like an over-sized golf-cart ... they haul stuff with it.

This week our kids “hailed” Johnny all over the farm.

He smiles ... he goes “thumbs up.” Instead of hiding from the camera like he did last year ... he poses every chance he gets ----- in fact, he wants the camera!!

He spilled food on our kids ... he cried on their t-shirts ... and they didn’t blink an eye!!

JOHNNY IS NOT AUTISTIC!@!! ... he’s Johnny: friend, child of God.

Just like in our church ----- Nathan Kuehn is Nathan Kuehn ... Ronny Kuehn is Ronny!!

Johnny has hope. He has a reason to get up each day.

He has a reason to take his medication. Will he ever be NORMAL???????? ----- well, I don’t even know what “normal” is anymore.

What’s normal for our kids and our Heartland family is TO LOVE and to care ... to embrace the moment ... and to bring joy and goodness into a young boy’s heart.

As we left Heartland which is hard to do ... we talked.

I reminded our kids ----- *when you go home ... when you go back to school ... don’t leave this spirit of love & passion behind.*

It’s not easy “coming home.” In the halls of Lockport High or Sandburg ... when you go back to your routines ... when you talk to someone you love who is living with cancer or Alzheimer’s ----- you gotta try to keep this spirit in your heart.

Everyday ... there is hope ... AND YOU ARE A PART OF IT.

It’s in the small-fun moments of life ... that we can celebrate hope and goodness.

Our last night in Texas is a celebration. We take all our kids & as many of the Heartland family as possible out for a nice dinner on the RIVERWALK. The LONE STAR RESTAURANT gives us a big room ... so all 30 of us can sit around the table.

As we invade this room ... with all our laughter and loud voices ... I notice an elderly couple at a corner table ----- trying to enjoy a quiet dinner ... *UNTIL WE COME ALONG!!*

The look in their eyes says it all. I go over to their table ... introduce myself ... apologize for the interruption ... and let them know we will respect their presence. They don’t look convinced.

I ask our kids to respect this couple and to keep the noise down. THE RESPECT is no problem. Asking them to be quiet on their last night is kind-of like asking Walter Payton not to hustle!@!!

I ask our waiter ... what is your name???? He responds: “My name is POPE.”

He asks me what I do ... I tell him I am a “priest” ... then he bows ... does the sign of the cross ... and gives me a blessing!@!! I tell my new-found friend Pope ---- “See the couple over there you are waiting on???? ... please put their dinner on our tab.” Pope responds ---- are you serious? OH, YES I AM!!

It was fun watching this couple trying to figure out why they didn’t get a bill.

As this couple leaves ... they come over to our table ----- smiles as big as Texas: “*You folks have made our day ... thanks so much ... what a beautiful thing you have done for us.*” We find out --- they live in Michigan ... two hours from our church. They will be in Chicago in November ... they want to come to our church. A moment. A slice of goodness.

Yes ... there is hope. And --- there is Pope. Yes, hope is a journey ... and sometimes ... it’s just plain FUN!!

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