

Sermon: July 4, 2010
"Eli ... Ricardo ... and AMERICA"

I have done some "major reminiscing" this past week? do you do much of this???

An ordinary visit kind-of triggered it.

I'm visiting one of our member's dads in a nursing home. I really don't know him. During our conversation he asks me:

"Well, Rev --- how long have you been at the church?????"

It's Thursday, July 1 ... then I realize: HEY, IT'S 36 YEARS TO THE DAY THAT I FIRST WALKED INTO ALL SAINTS!!

On my way home, I'm reflecting ...

Preacher or plumber ... artist, house-wife, house-husband, salesperson, mechanic ... "the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker" ... are you as good at what you do, as you used to be?????

Are you "at the top of your game"???

Yesterday I ask our custodian, Linda ----- "how long have you been here?" *20 years, she responds!!*

You've been putting up with me for 20 years?????

So, my friends ... all of us ... our guests from the VFW, who have been coming here for years!@!! ...

WE ARE GROWING "OLD" TOGETHER.

I walk into Kosnars yesterday ... a combination liquor store and "spiritual oasis"!!!!!! ...

"Hey, Koz, how are you?????"

"OK, Rev ... what's happening?????"

"Well ... if you ever came to church ... you would know!!

Kozie gets a bit quiet ... a little serious ----- "You know, Rev ... we won't be here much longer."

Kozie is one of those guys I've known all my 36 years just a kid running around the store with his dad ... years ago.

When you call the store, he answers the phone ... when you walk in, he's behind the counter ...

Seeing him and his store ----- well, it's something I never want to change. But the day is coming, the store will be no more.

Everyday in life ... we are reminded ...

The flag ... the wrinkles on our faces ... the names on the bricks out-back -----yes, all reminders:

nothing stays the same.

Well ----except for a couple things:

The power of goodness. The healing of God's spirit.

The gentleness of a humble carpenter.

NOTHING CAN EVER TAKE THIS AWAY!!

The Statue of Liberty says: "Give me your tired, your poor ... the huddled masses, yearning to breathe free ..."

YES ----- SEND THESE TO ME!!

This is why we are here ... it's why the church is here ... it's why the door is open and the coffee perks.

It's why these gentlemen went overseas ...risking their lives

it's why we fly the flag everyday.

It's why I get goose-bumps when I read all the names on the bricks.

I see Mike Sullivan's son's name, with the letters ---- KIA ("killed in action") ...

We now carry his torch ... that his sacrifice will never be in vain.

I'm out back this week ... thinking about what this area looked like 36 years ago. Everything was wild ... almost looked abandoned. Here comes Ricardo and his crew ----- they have been cutting our grass, pulling weeds, trimming bushes for years. Thanks to these guys from Jim Melka's place we have an oasis of beauty and peace.

When Ricardo & Co. come before noon ... the coffee is on. If it's afternoon ... they leave with a bucket of beer.

Last week ... in the morning ... Jim (the "boss") is going over the crews' schedule.

He wants them to cut the church grass first thing in the morning. Ricardo kind-of grimaces ----- "No, Jimmmeeeee ...

we think it's best if we go to the church sometime in the afternoon!@!!"

Amazing ... "a bucket of beer" could be the answer to "world peace."

Yesterday I'm out back again ... and Eli shows up. He's Jim Melka's brick-man. Over the past 10+ years ...
he has laid almost every brick that graces our "back-40."
I find out he lives not far from my daughter Casey ... in the Pilsen area of Chicago. He also has family in Mexico.

I'm thinking, reflecting, praying ...
People like "Kozie" ... hard-workers like Ricardo and Eli ...
They all remind me why I'm so *proud to be an American*.
It's not about raw power.
It's not about who is "right."
It's not about being better than anyone else.

IT'S ABOUT BEING A LAMP OF GOODNESS ... A BEACON OF HOPE ----- for those who yearn to be free.

I'm listening to some religious broadcast on the way to church this morning. This guy ----- he preaches an "angry
kind of religion" believe this, OR YOU AREN'T GOING TO MAKE IT.
I want to call him and say ----- *"Don't you understand???? What's so much fun about being religious is
being able to SEE JESUS and to SEE GOODNESS in the ordinary people and moments of life".*
Kozie ... Eli ... Ricardo ... Jimmmmmeeeeee ... the VFW ... you and me?????

Yesterday I have a funeral. The deceased is a Korean War veteran ... so a gentleman from the Navy presents his wife
with the American flag. Before the service ... I go up to the Naval officer and say:
"Especially on this 4th of July weekend ... I want to thank you for serving and protecting our country."
The officer ----- I find out he was born in Egypt ... is an American citizen ... and, of course,
his career is the Navy.

I think of those words: "Give me your tired, your poor ... the huddled masses, yearning to be free."
It's why we get up in the morning.
It's in the very air we breathe.

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