

Sermon: March 14, 2010
"Blackjack gum and world peace"

I'm a bit discouraged ... maybe you are, too. I guess "the world" is getting me down. Just look at our state .. we don't pay our bills. Our adopted son Q is on Medicaid ... do you think a local doctor wants to touch him? ----- no way. They know the state won't pay the bill. Look at our school districts. Your daughter finally makes a team ... and then you find out ----- all sophomore athletics are gone: no money. Many good people like you ... losing your jobs. Even stuff we do at the church ----- we never want it to be a financial burden to you. From putting down new carpet to collecting money for the youth retreat ----- we need to be cautious and responsible.

The problem is ----- people don't seem willing to work together.
We do here ... and we do a pretty good job of it. "This place" is not about who gets the credit or whose office it is or whose idea it is or who makes all the decisions. Here ---- all that matters is LIFE ... GOODNESS ... A DOSE OF GRACE.
We are about "love buckets" and God's love all around.
Our agenda is simple.
The plan is pretty basic.

But what's going on in our country is NUTS. Our ideals ... our passion for freedom and goodness ... that sense of justice and fair play & coming together for the common good ----- it's GONE ... and it's frightening.

This morning ... it's dark ... it's cold and damp ... reading the newspaper doesn't help. I'm trying to figure out the secret to world peace before you folks start coming to church. And I'm thinking of the words of a funeral director I worked with yesterday. He asks me: "Don, why don't you talk about BLACKJACK GUM anymore?"

I look at Jeff ... kind-of smile ... thinking: WHAT A STUPID QUESTION!!" Then I realize ... he is serious.
Why don't I talk about blackjack gum anymore? You are right ... I don't. Somehow ... I have lost the "joy" of telling this simple story.

Do you remember blackjack gum??? It's hard to find. It used to be at the Sinclair station ... right next to Beamon's gum and Clove gum. Man, am I getting old!@!! Plus ... it's horrible stuff. Two chews and the flavor is gone!!

I loved Sundays as a kid ----- it was grandma and grandpa day. They would come here ... or we would go there. One Sunday night I went to bed ... pulled down my bed sheets ... and there was a stick of blackjack gum. I got up Monday morning ... and there was another stick in my sock drawer. Finally I went downstairs to get my books ready for school ----- a stick of blackjack gum in my math book.

I'm only nine years old ... what's this about???? ... I ask my mom: where did these pieces of gum come from????
She just smiled.

Well ... it was the beginning of a beautiful journey. I began finding gum everywhere ----- on the front porch after school ... in my shoes ... under the pillow.

A Swedish grandpa's way of saying ---- "I love you ... I've been here ... and ----- I'll be back!!"

I know now ----- BLACKJACK GUM is the secret to world peace.

If all of us would chew and share blackjack gum the economy, health-care, peace, education, public transportation ... it would all be fixed!!

When Jeff asked me about the gum story ... I was a bit embarrassed. Sometimes I get discouraged ... then I get cynical ... and I forget the joy of simple things and simple miracles.

We learn a lot about God and our faith ... from the love of those around us.

*a piece of gum in a sock drawer,
a fuzzy animal on Sunday morning,
a quiet nod or a soft "hello,"
a phone call on an ordinary Wednesday,
a check in the love-bucket you didn't expect,
a wave from a little kid, whom you didn't think noticed you ...*

It's easy to forget the power of love. It's easy to forget the power of kindness. It's easy to forget ... in life ... what's important and what's not.

We come in all shapes and sizes ----- liberals, conservatives, republicans, democrats ... Lutherans and Catholics ... Christians, Jews, Muslims, agnostics ... church-goers and non-church-people ... married, single, gay, straight, big families and small ... we are abled and dis-abled ...

So, what's the secret of getting us all together????

It's inside each one of us ... it's the precious "heartsong" little Mattie talks about and shares with us!!

How about the gospel for today ----- yes, the 2 sons ... the "good son" and the "prodigal son" ...

There is the good one: steady, does his homework and chores ... always there.

Then there is the "bad son" the goof who is forever testing you. Its' like ... all by himself ... he sucks the energy right out of the house. He runs away ----- "thank God he is gone!"

Then: HE COMES BACK. Dad throws a party ... and the good son can't understand why: HEY, YOU NEVER HAD A PARTY FOR ME!!

What does the father say to the good son: "Son, you are always with me ... everything I have is yours, all the time ... but your brother? ... he was dead, but now is alive. He was lost ... now he's found!!"

This story ... it's about me ... it's about you.

In many ways ... I am the good son. I work ... I try hard ... I take care of my family!!

But spiritually ----- I am the "prodigal son."

I can get lost. I lose that sense of wonder, in life. I have lost that spirit of hope and joy ... in life's simple moments.

WE'VE GOT TO GET IT BACK.

WE NEED TO RE-DISCOVER THE JOY, THE MIRACLE, THE WONDER!@!!

God sends his son.

He also gives us BLACKJACK GUM.

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