

Sermon: November 7, 2010

“Vera’s spot”

It’s easy to lose touch over time.

When there is a need ... we respond right away. Our giving is generous. Then --- life goes on.

We all have stuff to do. And ... we can’t help everyone all the time.

Some 14-15 years ago ... a young kid from Robbins is involved in an after school program. It’s something we supported ... and very close to the heart of my wife Jude and our friend Martha Sokol.

He goes on to Eisenhower High School ... a wonderful football player. Then ... at the age of 16 ... he and his buddies are in a car accident. He is paralyzed. We dedicate the “love bucket” to him ... bring our donation to the high school. That was 10 years ago.

The other day in the Sun-Times ---- a follow-up story. Rocky is still paralyzed ... confined to his bed. After all this time ... his insurance has run-out. It’s just Rocky and his mama ----- who spends every night sleeping at the foot of her son’s bed.

I think of her faith ... her spirit ... her soul ... her heart-song.

Rocky is “our child,” too. Rocky ... like all of us ... is a *child of the universe*.

Some might say “God has a plan” for Rocky and his mom ... I’m not so sure. God gives us life. God creates us and sustains us. I don’t believe “God’s plan” includes things like ----- car accidents, kids being paralyzed, cancer, Alzheimer’s, young people suffering ...

Somehow ... God’s spirit rises up out of life’s tough moments. God uses the “moments of our lives” ... and in these “moments” he speaks to us, holds us, nudges us, and sustains us. God hurts as much as we do when one of his children is suffering.

This morning ... as we worship and remember the “saints” ... yes ----- there is a mama out there ... whose mission in life is to hold onto her son’s dignity and spirit. To give him hope.

And our mission? ----- is to care!!

Yes, life is a yo-yo ... full of ups and downs.

Life is a cup ----- sometimes full, sometimes empty ... and everything in-between.

If you like high school sports ... this is a fun time of the year. If you like high school music and drama ... it’s a good time of the year. If you like high school and junior high kids ----- yes, it’s a good time of the year.

I’ve been here a long time ... and I am still stunned and inspired by the kids you have raised here.

Friday night ----- 38 of “your kids” spent the night at the church. We had a campfire ... and we asked each of the kids to share “their passion” at this point in their lives.

**One kid, who is now a freshman in college ... said his passion is OUR CHURCH ... how about that???

**One young lady said her passion is “ALGEBRA”!@!! ... I mean ... where did she come from??

After the campfire we come into church ... for a “mass” in Vera Heiser’s honor. I can’t believe a good Lutheran like me would call it a “mass”!@!! Then we made banners. One of the kids gets Vera’s wheelchair out of the closet. He puts it next to the fireplace ----- where Vera enjoyed sitting after church on Thursday.

On the banner next to the chair ... the young man draws an arrow and writes ---- “*Vera’s spot*” ...

Now, I don’t know what this kid will get on his ACT score ... or where he’ll go to college ... but with a heart this big ----- he is an honor student in our book!!

The kids leave early Saturday morning ... and into the parking lot comes a large charter bus. It’s the Sandburg High School boys cross-country team ---- on their way to the state championship meet. Coach Johnnie comes in ----- “Hey, Rev ... we need a blessing.” (I hope this isn’t a sign of desperation!@!!)

The kids come into our sanctuary and sit down ----- so young, so thin!@!!

As I talk to them, I flash back to a moment almost 37 years ago. We hosted an event called the “Lutheran Olympics.” We were losing to Holy Apostles Church. This kid on our team (who is now 50 years old,

and was in my first confirmation class) ... he calls our team together.

“Hey, remember Pastor Don’s children’s sermon this morning? ---- about the doo-dadds!@!?!?”

Some of us have one doo-dadd ... some of us have lots ... but ----- we can’t bury them. Let’s use them,
and compete with everything we have!@!!

(This is back when I was young and couldn’t stand losing ... we beat Holy Apostles ... in fact, we beat them so
bad ---- the church isn’t ever there anymore!@!!)

I look at the kids from Sandburg.

“Your team is amazing. You have the current state champion ... many of you finish at the end of the pack.

You have doo-dadds ----- maybe one or two ... maybe a bucket-full.

Life isn’t about how many you have ... it’s what you do with what you’ve got.”

I give them each a “Lutheran doo-dadd” hope I didn’t jinx them!!

There’s a kid named Rocky ... spends his life not being able to run or walk. He may not think he has any
doo-dadds left. But his mama refuses to let him bury what he does have.

Life is about hope ... hope is about life.

There’s a lady named Vera, whose doo-dadd meter is running on empty. Yet ----- there is a youth group filling
her doo-dadd meter back up. This is what we are called to do.

There is a long-time lady-florist from Worth. She died the other day ... no church ... so, she “got me.”

I talk to her only son ... “I just want to introduce myself before doing your mom’s funeral ...”

He’s got a deep-raspy voice ----- echoing a tough life, and way too many non-filter cigarettes.

“So, rev ... I’m not much of a church-guy ...”

“Either am I ...” ----- we both laugh.

“I went to a Wisconsin Synod school ... growing – up ...”

“Then ... we won’t get along!@!!” ----- a couple more chuckles.

“Rev. ---- when you get to my mom’s service ... I hope you are flexible ... ‘cause this is gonna be one
diverse-mixture of humanity.”

I arrive the other night at the funeral home ----- “diverse-mixture” is putting it mildly.

I stand in front of them ... *this is who we are!! ... this is what we are!!*

Life is all about what we do with what we’ve got.

a cross-country team

an empty wheelchair

kids overnight ... trying to find their way ...

you and me ---- sluggin’ it out everyday ...

heart-songs and spirits ... coming together

Rocky and his mama ... burning the candle of hope

Yes .. the flame can grow dim at times ...

but ---- *it never stops burning.*

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