

Sermon: October 24, 2010
“Ollie, humility, and skeletons”

I remember how I used to get excited about election day. As a kid ... watching the results with my parents ... the conventions were really “conventions” ... suspense until the end ...
Honestly ... I’m not looking forward to November 2. The negativity and nastiness have taken a toll.
I want to vote for someone who will “raise me up” ... someone who inspires and wants to work with
“everyone”
to make our nation and state better.

I remember running for school board years ago. Someone asks me ----- “why are you running against him.”
My reply ----- “I’m not running **against** anyone ... I’m running **for** a position.”
The whole “culture” of the political process is sick. Why would anyone who is creative and energetic want to subject themselves and their family to the harshness of what is going on??

Recently someone asks me ----- “Don, you are older ... maybe a bit wiser and humbler ... you’ve got a kid back in the system ... maybe you should consider running for school board again ... help bring back the good old days.”
You have to be kidding? I have enough “skeletons” in my closet to outfit the entire Sunday School.
I wouldn’t survive a week of campaigning!!

So often ... in life ... we are judged by our mistakes. All of us make mistakes ...
a bad decision ... an ethical breakdown ... our addictions and wrong turns ... it’s all part of who we are.
And, yes --- we need to be accountable.
But we all know what it’s like today. One person can say a bad thing about you ... one accusation ... one little comment in an e-mail or on facebook ----- and suddenly you are guilty and on the defensive. You start apologizing for stuff you never did.

Enter Jesus ... in the words of today’s song --- “what a friend we have in Jesus ...
all our sins and griefs to bear ... all because we do not carry ----- everything to God in prayer.”
Jesus tells the story about two people who come into the temple to pray.
The first guy touts all his accomplishments ... he’s happy he is not like “other sinners.”
I can be like this ----- self-righteous, always comparing myself to someone else.

On the other side of the room is “the sinner” ... a tax-collector. He comes to church and lays his humanity on the altar!! Lord ... I’m sorry, I’m human, I fall short. I want to be your child, but I know I don’t deserve to be.
Now, Jesus asks ---- who is really my disciple??
Then Jesus shares some of the most powerful words in the gospels:
“Those who exalt themselves will be humbled ... those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

A few of us were talking about our 50th anniversary the other day.
I’m not a big “anniversary guy.” But ----- 50 years is pretty kool!! ... thanks to each of you and God’s good grace and sense of humor.
My buddy says to me: “Don, a lot of goofs have crossed our path over the years. People who never would have set foot inside a church ... people from all walks of life ... the love bucket ... the Freds of this world ...”
THIS IS PART OF WHAT MAKES THE CHURCH THE CHURCH.

It’s a place for tax-collectors and sinners.
You can make a wrong turn in life ... but you can also make a “right turn” into our parking lot and discover a God who is your “friend.”
*“Are you weak and heavy-laden ... cumbered wit a load you can’t carry by yourself?
Have your friends forsaken you? ... not stood by you when you needed them???”*
Guess what? ----- YOU CAN FIND YOUR SOLACE HERE!!”

When Jesus comes back ... no, wait ---- he is back!!

Wherever there is hope ... wherever we find a moment of kindness ... whenever God's grace shines through ----- JESUS IS BACK.

My guess is ... if Jesus does come back in human form ... he might look a bit like OLLIE. Ollie is from Jordan ... he owns a convenient store. Someone says to me: IF ALL SAINTS WERE A CONVENIENT STORE ... IT WOULD LOOK LIKE OLLIE'S.

His first store was next to Cabrini Green. When Cabrini Green was, for the most part, torn down ... he moved his store a few blocks away.

Ollie loves his customers ... many of them "down and out."

He always had a "wad" of money in his pocket ... and if someone was broke, he shared it. If a mom came in and couldn't afford diapers ... he'd take them off the shelf and give them to her. When someone needed to talk ... he'd listen. Married 40 years ... sent his kids through college ... Talk about "giving from one's poverty" ... about giving from the "very guts of who you are" ----- this is Ollie!!

Jesus says: WHEN YOU ARE HUMBLE ... YOU WILL BE EXALTED.

Why someone would come into his shop on a Saturday night ... and shoot this beautiful man ... why someone would want to destroy this "hunk of goodness" ----- who will ever know????

OLLIE reminds us ...
All this negativity around us reminds us ...
All "God's goofs" remind us ----

Our calling in life is simple ...
Your life ... our shared journey ... what you do and who you are ... "your little corner of the kingdom" ---
IT IS ALL A TEMPLE.

By the way you live and work and love ----- you become a teacher unto others.

Life is a store ... stocked with shelves of goodness.
Not everyone will buy it ... but like Ollie and Jesus ----- WE NEED TO GIVE IT AWAY.

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