

Sermon: January 2, 2011

“Angels and bullies”

“The word becomes flesh, and dwells among us.”

God’s word ----- comes to us in the “earthy-ness” of life around us. His angels comes to us in amazingly different packages.

Had a funeral this week ... and it’s really affected me.

Michael died at the age of 42. He ... like some of you, and some of the people you love ... battled and lived with mental illness. He was bi-polar.

On occasion ... when I am called to do a funeral ... the family will almost “apologize” ahead of time.

He wasn’t a church-goer.

Don, he was different.

I’m not that big on religious people anyway ... and I love folks who are “different.”

Michael was unique. A “big guy.” When he could no longer work, he poured himself into body-buidling. And --- he loved tattoos.

Before the funeral I took my daily “walk out back” ... visited my brother’s brick and tree. My bro’ Gary died way too young. He was “different” ... wonderfully different.

“Hey, bro’ ---- will you watch-over-me today???”

So often we judge people by “exterior stuff” that doesn’t matter.

Michael has an 18-year-old son, named Max. The relationship between the two of them can warm the coldest of hearts. Mike had this way of attracting people. Kids would just run-up to him. He would talk to them and tell stories. At the health club ... older folks were drawn to Mike. He listened ... took time ... they loved him.

MIKE WAS A BIG TATTOOED LOVING ANGEL.

Somehow ... by the grace of God ... he used is disability and place in life to make the world around him much better than it otherwise would have been!!

Isn’t this what life is all about?

For Michael ... my brother ... for you ... for me ...

Each of us has a package ... each of us has gifts ... each of us has something to offer.

We need to use it ... grasp it ... share it.

Sure ----- violence and terrorism and prejudice and hatred ... it’s all around us.

We read about it ... see it ... experience it. Probably ---- it will never end.

BUT ----- THE KEY TO CHANGING IT ... it’s “in here.” It’s in the hearts and souls of each one of us

that “the word becomes flesh, and dwells among us.”

It’s “in here” where Jesus walks and speaks to our journeys.

When we can begin to accept who and what we are ...

When we can work with the humble gifts we’ve been given ...

When we quit trying to be someone else, someone we were never meant to be ...

THEN WE NEVER have to put anyone else down ... or falsely judge another person ... or do anything cutting at the dignity and humanity of our brothers and sisters.

Which brings me to an issue very personal to me ... it’s a “hot button.”

And I’m thinking about a couple kids in our church who are going through this.

Lots of kids “out there” are DIFFERENT. They march to their own drummer ... they have certain “ways” about them ... and because of this ----- they are BULLIED, MADE FUN-OF ...and **it hurts.**

I’m thinking of the movie “Front of the class” ----- a “Hallmark” movie.

It's the true story of a young man who lives with "turrets syndrome." This takes on many forms. For him -----
he would make uncontrollable twitching movements ... and make random sounds ...

When you are with someone like this ... sure, it can be annoying and disruptive.

This young man would get "creamed" in school.

There is a school assembly --- a concert. Throughout the program ... this young man is twitching, making
noises ... the kids look at him, point at him, and embarrass him.

At the end of the assembly ... the principal asks everyone to sit down ... and he asks this student to come up
onto the stage. I'm thinking: now even the principal is going to embarrass the kid.

What happens is a life-changing moment.

The principal asks the student: **WHAT DO YOU WANT THE MOST?**

He responds: *Just to be treated like everyone else.*

The student walks off the stage ... towards his seat. The student body explodes with applause and a standing
ovation. A moment of acceptance, grace, and courage.

His journey is far from over. But through perseverance and an incredible will to succeed ... he becomes a
teacher. Not any teacher ... but **TEACHER OF THE YEAR.**

There is a young man in our church. Junior high ... delicate ... smart ... unique ... sensitive ...

I remember the first time I ever gave away money after the children's sermon. He comes up to me after
worship: "*Pastor Don ... is it ok if I put my money into the love bucket ... for some kid who isn't as lucky as
me???*" This young man from our church gets it ... but some of his classmates don't.

Kids like him can be an easy target ... and it's not easy for him ... but he knows he's not alone.

As a church ... we are as human as anyone else.

Some things we do well ... maybe others --- not so well.

But ----- **THERE ARE NO BARRIERS HERE.**

Black and white ... gay or straight ... tattoos and no tattoos ... Catholic, Lutheran, Jewish, no religion at all ...
masculine and feminine ... strong or weak ... abled and dis-abled ... polar or bi-polar ...

Around this humble-but-majestic altar ... around this table that calls out: come and eat, come and drink ...

WE ARE ONE ... WE ARE TOGETHER.

When someone is made to feel like he/she isn't good enough ... when someone feels like it's ok to push
someone around because he/she is different ...

we have to stand tall ... we need to make sure "the word becomes flesh" and dwells among us ...

Thank-you, my brother ...

Thank-you, Michael ...

To those who are fragile ... this "table" beckons you ...

To those who think you are "better than" someone else ... it's time to discover
a bit of humility and grace ...

"The word has become flesh" ... and it dwells right where it belongs ... "in here."

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