

Sermon: June 26, 2011
"Randy's ... Nagel's ... and Papa Joe's"

Jesus looks at the children and his followers: *"Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones ... you will never lose your reward."*

Isn't this what life and religion are all about? ----- giving a "cup of water" to those around us!@!!

Just got back from "confirmation camp" ----- my 37th year in a row!@!!

20 kids from our church are part of the camp. These kids are from 6 different high schools ... so, most of them hardly know each other. Each of them is unique. We have our "jocks" ... a few music-and-theatre types ... one good ol' farm boy ... a loner or two ... a couple "talkers" ... a couple kids who know what it's like to be bullied at school.

And yet ... this week ... for 6 days ----- the "labels" melt away.

Oh, they may not know the Bible like they should ... which is probably "my fault."

But ----- they "get it." They know in their hearts ----- your faith and beliefs are measured by the way you live and reach-out to others.

When you are good to the "little goof" over there ... when you reach-out to this person over here ... you are REACHING-OUT TO GOD. It's in here ... where God really lives and breathes.

I think a lot about the church ----- not just "our church" ... but what the church means, and the different places we "discover" the church. The church is more than "Sunday morning." It's a feeling ... it's an "inside job." When you walk in the door here ... how does it feel? Do you feel like a stranger? ... do you feel welcome? ... is there "good karma" in the air?

I think this is why people like to drop by during the week. Each of us --- no matter how old or young --- we need spaces and places where we feel safe ... places that reflect the goodness of life.

Yes, this is "our church" ... but out there (in the "real world") --- "the church" takes-on lots of forms for many different kinds of people.

For 37 years ... Randy's Market has been "my church."

For 37 years ... Nagel's Auto service has been "my church."

How about "Papa Joes" down the street?? ... the "main papa" is here today ... we are baptizing one of this grand-children.

You can buy food anywhere ... get your car fixed anywhere ... go anywhere you want to eat ... but even in common places of business ... it's about your heart and soul.

Do you believe in what you do? Do you have passion for the people who walk through your door? It's about honesty and trust and loyalty and goodness!@!!

The church is more than a sign or a label.

When you believe ... as I do, and as many of you do ... that *God is in the very fabric of life itself* ... when you believe in the power of the "cup of cold water" ... when you welcome strangers ... then there is no moment, no space, no intersection in your daily life ... that can't become "the church" for someone who crosses your path.

When I go to Randy's or Nagel's ... in a spiritual way, I'm *going to church*.

Why? ... because life is about seeing and feeling God's spirit in the common spaces and places in life.

It's good to step out of our own "little world" ----- into someone else's world ... and re-discovering: life is not all about me ... it's not just "my journey" ... there's a whole bunch of people "out there" who make my journey possible and worth living.

I go into Randy's or Nagel's or "the good Papa's" ... we've baptized their kids, buried their parents, stood by them when they've cried ... because "they are us."

So ... when Randy's Market begins to close its door in the next couple weeks ... my gosh, a part of me is going to die ... because they are a part of who I am!@!!

This past week ... a few of us from camp went to visit the youth program at the Salvation Army in the inner city of Racine. It's in a tough neighborhood.

An old gymnasium ... a couple of craft rooms. Now ... the Salvation Army building has a "real" gym: no air-conditioning .. a couple ceiling fans ... an old wood floor ... scratches on the wall ... lots of common sweat, playing ball in the heat and humidity.

As we enter ... "the boss" sits us down. DENNIS is old school ... a retired white-guy in a black environment ... where color doesn't matter ... and respect and discipline are the main ingredients.

Dennis speaks to us with passion:

The Salvation Army is not just an "organization." We are a church ---- a God and Jesus-believin' church.

Of the kids you will meet in a moment ----- only 2 have fathers who live at home.

Most of the kids you will meet have at least one relative in jail. Your job? ----- LOVE THEM. Talk to them, play with the, hug them ... love them as Jesus has told us: LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.

It was fun ... watching our kids in the art room and in the gym ----- playing, laughing, drawing, competing. Smiles and art-work ... young boys "swaggering" up and down the gym floor ... with a guy old enough to be their grandpa ---- giving them the attention and discipline they don't get at home.

I realize more and more: I spend too much time "in my world." The church ... my schedule and plans ... trying to please everyone. I need to explore more ... move around, open-up.

I'm watching our kids on the basketball court ... trying to be fair, and nice, and good sports.

I call a time-out ... and speak to our team.

"Hey ... remember what Dennis told us two hours ago: love these kids, be good to them.

This doesn't mean we have TO LOSE THE GAME!@!!"

Two dunks later ... we won the game.

Actually ... we "won" by just being there ... soaking in the "love and goodness" of Dennis and "company."

On this day: THE GYM is the church.

DENNIS has the eyes and heart of Jesus.

THESE KIDS ... are "all God's children."

It's amazing what "a cup of cold water" can do.

Don Borling

All Saints Lutheran Church

13350 LaGrange Road 13350 LaGrange Road Orland Park, IL

www.allsaintsjoy.com allsaintsjoy@sbcglobal.net 708-448-2939

