

Sermon: October 16, 2011

"Success"

I'm sure each of us ... no matter how secure and strong we may be, most of the time ... has moments & times when we feel "inadequate." Pastor or teacher ... artist and parent ... coach or friend ... uncle and brother ... or just as a "human being" ... yes, we can easily feel like we don't "measure-up" ...

I have a funeral later today for a gentleman ... only 47 years old. He's a tradesman ... and I know one of the things that weighed on his heart and soul ----- he hadn't worked in over two years.

Most of us take a lot of pride in being a GOOD PROVIDER for our family. Not having a job can be tough.

I mentioned in my puny newsletter this past month ... one of the times I feel most "inadequate" in my job is when I write the newsletter. Maybe it's my dad's fault. He was a man of few words. I started writing my parents letters, when I went to college ... thanking them profusely for the opportunity they were giving me.

My dad didn't like writing letters. The only one he wrote me went like this:

Dear Donnie,

I had nothing to do ... so, I thought I'd write.

I have nothing to say ... so, I think I'll close.

love, Dad

So, about feeling "inadequate" when I do the newsletter. There is one guy in town, whose newsletter is at least 12 pages long. I think it even has a "sports section." One of my colleagues in Minnesota (where everyone is Lutheran!!) has a newsletter every week ---- with his picture on it!!

Well ... anyway ... I got a letter yesterday ... from my buddy Andy in Minnesota.

Hi, Don ---- you were talking about me in your newsletter, right?

Don ---- I LOVE YOUR NEWSLETTER. And, by the way, Don ... I'd like to remind you of something.

When I came into Orland to begin our mission church ... you and the people of All Saints were the only local church that wanted me and my church to succeed.

You supported us ... even financially.

You encouraged me ... you were never threatened by me ...

I remember those days. I miss Andy. I remember asking ourselves ---- "why do other people have to resent another person's success???" Andy's letter has given me cause to reflect on what's important in life and what's not. We live ... to say the least ... in tumultuous times. Many of us are under lots of pressure.

There is a lot of anger "out there" ... lots of tension ... it's the way life is.

One of the things hurting the most is this ----- it's when people take a kind-of sadistic joy ... and spend lots of energy ... taking someone else down.

We see great athletes and politicians fall ... entertainers ... close friends, someone in our family ... pastors and plumbers ----- yes, all kinds of people "fall from grace."

LIFE IS NOT ABOUT TAKING ANYONE ELSE DOWN.

The gospel lesson for this morning is another example of the "religious elite" trying to take Jesus down!@!!

And guess what? ----- Jesus doesn't take the bait.

The Pharisees want Jesus to say something negative about Caesar. And when Jesus looks at the coin and sees Caesar's insignia on it ... he wisely responds: *Give unto Caesar what belongs to him ... give unto God what belongs to God.* The Pharisees leave beaten ... Jesus won't get sucked into playing their negative games!!

When Andy came into town ... I told him ----- *if you and your church can reach people we can't ... then God bless you. We are all part of the BODY OF CHRIST.*

The church is not me or you it's all of us together.

I want St. Michael's to succeed. (Oh, and they have!@!!)
I want Good Shepherd to succeed. I want my kids and your kids to flourish. I want the black Baptist Church on Sibley in Harvey to succeed. The self-employed artist ... our president ... our governor ... our state senator ... athletes and musicians ... the choir, the Sunday School ... the kid who took a wrong turn -----
LET'S ALL SUCCEED TOGETHER!!

Speaking of success ...
How many of you have adult children who don't go to church?????
Come on!@!! ... raise your hand. Join the club.
We have some pretty special kids here ... and they keep coming back!!
When do adult children come back????? ----- they come back to get married ... then maybe
for a baptism, if they have kids ...
And ... some come back after making a "wrong turn" ... and we call it: COMMUNITY SERVICE!!

So, one of our young adults calls me a couple months ago ...
"Hey, Pastor Don ... how are you?????"
Now, he hasn't darkened the door of the church for years ... so, I answer: "OK ... how many hours of
community service do you need????"
We both laugh.
He answers: "30."

He comes to my office. As I look at Mike ... I'm thinking. I don't need one more person coming to the church ---- vacuuming carpets that don't need to be vacuumed ... washing windows that don't need to be washed ... and suddenly ----- I have an idea.
"Mike ---- I'm going to put the ball in your court.
You are very creative ... and I know you love to write. So, I'd like you to create an essay about
what the church means to you.
I would like to have it by All Saints Sunday. When you finish ... I'll sign-off on your community service."

He is excited. So am I.
He brings me his essay this week.
It is so real. It's honest. Raw. Brilliant. Touching.
Most of all ---- it's him ...and that is really all that matters.

You just never know about the seeds we plant.
You just never know when and how God speaks to us.
I do know this: he speaks to us ----- warts and all ... gourds and all.

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October 16, 2011
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