

Sermon: October 2, 2011

“Walter ... colors ... life”

I am so tempted this morning NOT to read the gospel lesson. I often wonder who decides what lessons to read on a particular Sunday. This morning ... the lesson has such an “angry edge” to it. With all the edginess and anger in the world today ... you don’t need more of it shoved down your throat in church!@!!

A landowner has a vineyard ... and it’s time to collect his produce ---- the fruits of his labor. The landowner is out of town ... so, he sends his slaves to collect from the tenants. The tenants kill the slaves.

He sends more slaves ... same thing happens.

Finally he sends his own son ... his flesh-and-blood ... certainly they will respect him!!

No way --- the son is murdered ... as the tenants want to steal the owner’s inheritance.

The point is basic. God is the owner. He gives us this incredible world ... and we are “called” to take care of it. There is a lot of beauty in our world. I get here early on Sunday morning ... it’s still dark. Hey, I have important tasks. I have to play with the kids’ sermon toys ... and fill up these colored buckets with “stuff.”

My gosh ... this morning the STARS IN THE SKY ----- they just jump out at you. Then the sunrise: such a symbol of peace and hope. I look at all the “wonder” God shares with us ... and then I wonder ...

Why do we fight?

How can religion be so harsh?

I look at all the colors of nature ... the variety ... the plants & trees & soil ...

all the diversity how can any one person NOT like another person because of the color of his/her skin!!

We are black ... we are brown ... we are white & pink & red ...

We wear our hair differently ... we dress differently.

Look at our kids and grandkids ... our nieces and nephews ... look at the friends they bring home!@!!

The goofs they fall in love with. Such beauty. Such variety.

We don’t need people and voices pulling us apart. Prejudice and hatred ... they have no place.

And so what happens?

God sees how we act ... he sees his people NOT understanding his will ... God sees the barriers we humans erect. So ----- he sends his son ... just like the owner of the vineyard.

Jesus comes ---- not to start another religion ... but to help us understand *how to live, how to love, how to find meaning and joy in life.*

And, as we know ----- there were a whole bunch of people ... so caught up in their religion, so caught up in themselves, so caught up with their selfish rules and regulations ----- *they couldn’t stand Jesus’ goodness.*

They killed him ... thought he was gone.

Well, Jesus the man may be gone ... but **Jesus the spirit** is still kicking. He’s still living ... he is lurking all over the place ----- challenging each of us to be a beacon of hope in our humble world.

I can’t change the world ... you probably can’t either.

And the tough message of the gospel is ----- God can’t “change the world” all by himself.

He entrusts this world to us ... and we refuse to listen.

You know? ... all those religious goofs out there ... claiming to espouse God’s word and will??? ----- they don’t listen to the message of God’s own son.

We need fewer speeches ... and more gentle touches.

We need less religion ... and more spirit.

Less self-centered preaching ... and more humble miracles of the heart.

Something struck me this week.

It's football season ... like it or not. Even in this humble place ---- look at all the Bears and Packers jerseys.
Even now ... I can see some of you guys looking at your watch ... worrying about the 12 noon kick-off.

A book is coming out soon about Walter Payton. The author has a credible reputation. Yet the excerpts we
have seen they are mostly about Walter Payton's weaknesses and mistakes.

I would never want anyone to write a book about me. It would be short ... and some parts not very pretty.

Your life is a book ... and so is mine.

Like most of you ... I've done a few good things in my life. I've also done some things, gone through some
stuff ... and I wish I could take it back.

Jude always reminds me ----- *Don ... everything we go through ... each moment, every person we've
met ... every right turn and wrong turn ... each moment, big and small it makes us who we are today.*

When you expose someone's weaknesses ... when you go public with someone's mistakes and mis-steps ...
what about the people you hurt along the way???

His wife ... even if his marriage wasn't what we thought it was.

His kids.

All our kids and grandkids ... who have his poster hanging on their bedroom walls???

None of us lives in a vacuum. None of us is perfect. And yet ---- it's in our very human journey that God
speaks to us and his son nudges us.

I have my heroes ... you do, too.

Sure ---- we'd like them to be without blemish ... and there are things about them we don't want to know.

In a way ---- Jesus teaches us how to be a "hero" ...

It's not about being mistake-free. Rather ---- it 's how we handle our humanity. It's how we walk
in the midst of imperfection.

It's about seeing the sunrise and the stars ... the rainbows ... and knowing: in the midst of all that color and
majesty ----- each of us has a place.

It's not easy being green.

It's not easy being human.

But ---- ***the journey is worth it.***

Don Borling

All Saints Lutheran Church

13350 LaGrange Raad

Orland Park, IL 60462

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