

Sermon: October 7, 2018

“Passers-by in our lives”

I'm sure we all have what I would call ---- “passers-by” in our lives.

These people are not necessarily close friends ... or people we hang-out with a lot ... or even folks we know very well. They are folks who “cross our paths” ... and somehow ---- they make a difference in our journey. Maybe it's the way this person walks ... or talks. Maybe the look in their eyes. Maybe you are touched by his grace but somehow --- he/she touches your soul.

It's like “us” here. We don't all hang-out. I see you once a week. Yet there are times when you do something or say something and you touch my soul. You make a difference in my life.

Jesus was probably the “ultimate passer-by.” He comes into town ... and people just want to get a “glimpse” of him. A smile. A touch. It's like in the gospel lesson for today.

He comes into town ... people bring their kids for a blessing. The disciples are kind-of rude ---- “hey, Jesus doesn't have time for this!!” Jesus sees this and is indignant: “Bring the children to me ... forbid them not!! For such is my kingdom. This is to whom the kingdom belongs. If you don't receive the kingdom of God like a little child ... you will never enter it.”

When we see Jesus ... we see God.

When we see Jesus ... we get a glimpse of who God is. When we listen to him and hear his words ... I think of the 2nd lesson for today: “Jesus is the reflection of God's glory ... he is the imprint of God's very being.”

It's so ironic. For centuries ... God's people were looking for their “messiah” to be a mighty king.

Miracles the whole world would notice ... acts of power and might.

And here is this humble guy: sandals, a dusty robe, no possessions all he has is a life-giving inner spirit, touching one's soul. Yes, Jesus is the reflection of God. This passer-by ----- who loves kids, eats with sinners, mingles with the out-casts who believes in the power of love and kindness.

THE ULTIMATE PASSER-BY whom you don't want to pass-up!!

Speaking of passers-by in our lives ...

I had a different kind-of day Wednesday. Mark is a Lutheran minister, whom I've gotten to know a bit over the years. I mean ----- we're not best friends, and we don't see each other very often. Plus ---- he lives in Wisconsin. His daughter and family come to our church. Since he retired ... he visited here more often. And whenever I talked to Mark ... well, he “got to me.” He always touches my soul with his grace and acceptance. Ministers can often be critical of one another (can you imagine??) ... but Mark? ----- always a humble voice of affirmation.

Mark died a couple weeks ago. His funeral is at one of the churches he served ... in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin. At the last minute ... I decide to drive up for the service. First I have to stop by the church ... and let two workers in ---- one cleaning our carpets, the other stripping and waxing the tile floors.

6:00 AM ---- the workers are in ... next stop: Beaver Dam.

I know I'm not the “brightest bulb” in the lot ... my knowledge of matters religious and scriptural is limited. But ----- at the very heart-and-soul of what I believe ... the very thing fueling my passion every day ... that which gives me strength when I feel weak ... that which bolsters my faith when my faith gets a bit wrinkled ...

it's knowing: GOD LIVES IN THE VERY FIBER OF YOUR SOUL AND MINE.

As Jesus reflects the gentle power of God's spirit ...

so we are called to reflect that power ... 'cause it's IN HERE ... INSIDE YOU AND ME ...
this is where Jesus lives!@!!

Whenever I talked to Pastor Mark ... whenever I saw him worshipping in our sanctuary ...
his eyes, his heart ----- I would see a glimpse of a humble carpenter.
I'm sitting in a real-live pew in a church in Beaver Dam. I'm not a minister ... I'm not performing ...
I'm an ordinary guy, worshipping, giving thanks for a passer-by in my life.
A man who inspired me and challenged me ... without even knowing it.

I get back to Orland Park ... just in time to do a funeral for a Vietnam veteran, who didn't have a
church home. Afterwards ... it's getting late ... but I have to go back and lock-up the church.
I walk in the door ... and this crazy Lithuanian, who began doing our tile floor at 6:00 AM ... he's
still going at it ... it's 8:00 PM. And he is still a couple hours from finishing.
How can you still be here??? Well, I want to do a good job for you ... your floor needs lots of help!@!!

The carpet guy he is still working.
I can't believe you are still here!@!!
Hey, Don ... this building has "good vibes" ... your carpet needs to reflect that.

Before leaving ... I reach into my "magic back-pack" and pull out two crisp 50-dollar bills.
I give one to each of them.
My new Lithuanian best friend looks at me: Why are you doing this???
Hey ----- It's what goofy Lutherans do!!

It's late.
I get into my pick-up truck. I pause in the middle of the front parking lot,
and look back at the church.
*I think of Mattie Stepanek and his teacher Mr. Thompson.
*I think of Pastor Mark.
*I see the lights still on in the church ... with two guys still workin'.

And ... I am reminded once again
how close Jesus is!@!!

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