

Sermon: February 4, 2018

"Sacred meatballs"

Jesus was ... and still is ... "something else." Do you ever wonder what it was like being "him." He only lived 33 years. His ministry lasted just about 3 years. He had no possessions ... didn't travel very far ----- he walked everywhere. Had a "posse" of 12 disciples ----- his "inner circle." And yet ----- some 2000+ years later ... we are still talking about him. Chances are if Jesus showed up today, looking the way he did then ... and saying the things he said then ... we just might dismiss him as a kind-of "nut."

Jesus drove people crazy!! I mean ---- he "got" to you. He penetrates the soul!! He quietly challenged people to look at each other with different eyes. He took his Jewish religion ... and made it PERSONAL. Religion ... he teaches us ... is not about rules and robes and positions of honor or power. Religion is about LIFE. The way you live ... the way you speak ... the way you treat others.

This is the same challenge we face today. Jesus wants our religion to be personal. Real. Simple. Penetrating. He wants our religion to follow us out the door ... into our homes and workplaces ... so somehow we can make our "little corner of the kingdom" a bit better because we are here.

Yes ... "a day in the life of Jesus." In the gospel ... he begins his day in the synagogue. Then he is off to Simon's house ... whose mom is sick. Jesus cures her. That evening Jesus is surrounded by all kinds of people ----- healing them, casting out demons. Early in the morning Jesus gets up ... it's still dark ... he goes by himself to pray. The disciples are hunting for him ... saying: "Jesus, everyone is looking for you." And I'm sure Jesus is thinking ----- I just need some time alone ... to re-group ... to re-connect with the very soul of who I am!! In a way ... he is saying: "Yes, I can bring you healing ... and cast out your demons ... I can lift you up. But ----- when I am gone: I will be inside of you, with you but now you have to LIFT EACH OTHER UP!! I will forever live in you but ----- you have TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER."

I thought a lot about Jesus yesterday. About you. Our church. I had a "moderately awkward" funeral. A man in his early '60's. Catholic ... not practicing. Two sons. His mom. I call the family ... as I usually do ... asking them a bit about their loved one. But ---- nobody wants to share anything not even his mom. I get a cup of coffee in the lounge ... just before I begin the service. A friend of the family comes up to me: ""Father, what parish are you from?" I smile: "I'm the pastor All Saints Lutheran Church." She gets kind-of a pouty look on her face ----- "Oh, I did not know the family was having a Lutheran service." I keep smiling: "Don't worry ... I'm become more Catholic as I get older!!"

The service begins ... and I share these words ...
I've been doing funerals for almost 44 years. And honestly ... today ... right now ---- I don't know what to say. Oh, I can say all the so-called right words ... but will they make a difference?? Each of you has a journey ... a unique relationship to Jim. He had a journey ... and it has ended too soon. "Unfinished business" is a part of life. All I know is this ---- Jesus was a gentle soul. A loving and accepting soul. Jim is with him ... and he is with Jim. I don't know what religion all of you are ... and it really doesn't matter. I am probably the only Lutheran in the room. Today is not about religion. It's about life, and acceptance, and goodness. With a little bit of heaven thrown in.

As I'm leaving the service ... a little elderly lady pokes me on the shoulder ...
"Father ... is it ok if I call you that? ... anyway ... for a priest who didn't know what to say ...
you did a pretty good job!!"
"Mam I needed that ----- THANKS!@!!"

I'm about to get into my truck ... and a guy with a heavy Irish accent stops me.
"Hey, Reverend you know Lee Miller!!"
"Well ... yes, I do. I presided over his funeral."
"I knew that was you you also did the wedding for his daughter!!"
"Right again."
"Well, my son married his other daughter."
"Hey, how come I didn't get to do that wedding??"
"Hey, I'm Irish Catholic ... I'm not going to lose-out to a Lutheran minister twice!!"

Yes, there are times when I don't know what to say. How about you???

Often religious words get in the way of just being free to be ourselves. Life is often unfair and unpredictable.
Words don't come easy ... and that's ok. Life is not about what we say ... it's more about what
we do and who we are.

I'm talking to my brother early this morning. His voice comforts me on the way to church.
This spring he is retiring ... after 36 years as the head of the music therapy department at Radford University.
Jim says ... "can you imagine keeping the same job that long???" Oh, yes, I can.
I ask my bro'----- how do you know when it's time to retire?
He responds:
Don, when you are talking ... if people nod their heads up and down ... hey, keep on doing what you are doing.
But ... when you are talking ... and people are shaking their heads from side to side ...
then it's time to "hang it up."
Jim ----- what if people nod-off when I am talking???" ----- no response!!

Yesterday I am here. I walk into the kitchen ... where 7 guys are making almost 800 meatballs. These
meatballs go into the oven ... into the sauce ... onto the tables for people to eat ... who have paid \$20 for their
ticket ... so we can raise money to help our church ----- sacred meatballs? A lady in the back office is paying
our church bills. I see a bin of gently used shoes. I think of a co-worker of yours, who recently lost everything
in a fire. I see all the names in the prayer book. There is the love bucket. Ahhhhh --- the annual report, with
our budget ... outlining where our money goes, and how it helps lift others up. I see the flowers an over-
sized shoe, with a story to tell ... yes, our "humble temple" is ready for another day.

I don't know what to say so, I'll just say: "Thanks" and "Amen."

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