

Sermon: October 2, 2022

"Never the same ... but OK"

Whenever I do my thought for the day on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, I try to have a few words to capture the theme for the day. The words for tomorrow will be, "It'll never be the same, but it will be okay." I keep thinking of these words because they are so true.

I had a rather deep conversation with a long-time member the other day. He asked me when I thought the church would be getting back to normal ... and I told him: "Never." He then asked me if it will ever be the same again ... and I told him: "No. It is not close to being the same, at least on the outside." We are a bit smaller. We've been having a hard time getting people to come back. Just like your world, it's been up-side-down and sideways. Maybe we can be a little deeper, a little richer, a little more authentic ... so, it's not all bad. On one hand, it scares me ... but on the other hand - that's just the way life is. "It'll never be the same, but it will be ok."

Just look at our lives. It's not just the church. When you lose a loved one, it's never going to be the same. When something happens with your job, it'll never be the same. As you're getting older, and you can't do stuff that you used to do, it's never going to be the same. If something unexpected happens in your life, you know it's not going to be the same. But ---- there is "the light" from a God who loves and from people who care about us. Yes ... it will be "ok."

I continue to think about and pray for Ukraine. I talked with Father Vasyl this morning. The innocent suffering continues. He is scared for his dad and his brother. But if the war ever ends, will it be the same? Of course, it won't. But it can be ok. Their incredible spirit ... our never-ending prayers and support ... therein lies our hope.

Then there is Florida, South Carolina, and Georgia. I was talking with my friend Bob. He has a home there. He is head of the Andrew Foundation. They have been very good to our church over the years. He and his wife purposely went down there so they could be at their home while Ian hit. They are among the fortunate ones. Their damage is minimal. He told me he took a walk this morning. Bob is not an emotional type of person, but as he spoke his voice started to crack. He said that some of his neighbors lost everything. This is his second home. But for many of them, this is their only home. Now they have to start from scratch. Will it ever be the same? Probably not. But hopefully it will be ok because we care about each other. Even people like us who are miles away. There was a man on the news being interviewed. He just looked at the camera and said, "Please help us ... I have nowhere to go." It hurts to see what so many people have lost.

I would like to take a couple of minutes to talk about something near and dear to my heart: God. It is one thing to talk about God, and to worship God. More important is KNOWING that God is in the very fiber and guts of your being ... KNOWING God's spirit lives in the heart and soul of who we are. Yes, this is where God lives. It's easy for a preacher to talk about God ... we can be as slippery as anybody. Yes, we sing and worship ... and we should. But when you walk out the door here today ... we need to know that this incredible "higher power" nourishes us and holds us in the palm of his hand. And wherever our journey leads us ... we will have the strength to get through even the toughest of times.

One of my friends calls the other day and asks if we could talk about religion. "Sure can ... it's one of few things I know anything about!!" He says "If God is all powerful, how can he let this kind of stuff happen? Ukraine. Florida. My buddy's wife dying of cancer. The violence against children. Why can't God stop all this?" In responding ... I revert back to an image of God one of my professors taught me in seminary ... the same one who told me never to preach longer than ten minutes. He said, "When I envision God ... our creator, the giver of life ... I picture God with his hands in his pockets. Yes, he is the creator ... but God does not control everything."

page 2.

God does not control what we will do tomorrow. God does not control the mystery of nature. God's power is not grounded in control ... it's grounded in love and spirit.

There are times when God takes his hands out of his pockets. When you are going through a tough time, he holds you and embraces you. And when you have an "alleluia" moment ... God shares your joy.

God's power is a spiritual power of goodness and grace, embracing and nourishing. When we pray, it renews the connection between us and God, even though that God doesn't always give us the answer we may be looking for. Somehow our prayers cross the miles and lets people know we share this journey together.

Yes, there is too much suffering out there. We see it in Ukraine. The echo of Russian bombs. We see it in the violence close to home --- where innocent kids lose their lives before their dreams can come true. We see it in Florida --- where the forces of nature destroy what so many people have worked for. We often wonder: where is God in all of this?

God is here today ... with us, in this place. He is in Ukraine and in Florida. The spirit of love and kindness and goodness cannot always be measured by what is on the outside. It is somehow measured by the quiet courage to face yet another day.

In a world that never stays the same, in a church that won't stay the same, and in our ever-changing lives ... what gets us through? Maybe it's a love bucket way of life, or holding on to the power of goodness ... even when you wonder if the "power of goodness" makes a difference. Maybe that pile of coats for homeless veterans in Charter Hall is a reminder of why we are here. Yes, things may never be the same. But there is a spirit at the very heart of who we are that will never change ----- that makes it OK. Amen.

Don Borling

All Saints Lutheran Church 13350 S. LaGrange Road Orland Park, IL 60462

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