

Sermon: November 19, 2023

"Addictions"

Very powerful, very humbling ... being around all these folks.

I spent some time this weekend at the International Chicago Gamblers Anonymous Convention in Oak Brook. Wow --- folks from all over ... especially the Chicago area. Sweden, Africa, Ireland, England, Mexico. I was privileged to lead one of the workshops with Peggy. We focused on "religion and spirituality."

Everyone in the room introduces themselves: "My name is Michael B ... I am a compulsive gambler."

It gets to me: "My name is Don B ... I am a compulsive Lutheran."

When I first got involved with Gamblers Anonymous ... I didn't feel like I "belonged." I'm not a gambler.

But now I realize: I have my share of "addictions."

I'm addicted to myself. To my own agenda, to my own way of doing things.

Not to mention my addictions to church t-shirts, hats, and strong coffee!!

Each of us has a journey. You have yours, I have mine ... and nobody walks in your shoes. Only you!! But for a few moments here on Sunday morning or on Thursday night ---- we come together. Our differences are put aside for a few moments ... and God's spirit and our shared human spirit bind us together across the miles. Texas. Arizona. Austria. Toledo, Ohio. Hawaii. Wisconsin. Great Britain.

We are united and together.

I think of my own journey. I'm certainly less religious than I used to be. Is that good or bad? --- don't really know. But it is the way it is!! I'm more spiritual ... and I hope that's good. I look at our sign on LaGrange Road. It says: "All Saints Lutheran Church." Those very words can be a barrier. Someone drives by ... sees the word "Lutheran" ... well, I'm not Lutheran ... so, that church not for me.

Yet under the sign it says this week: "The Open Door." Our door is open ... not just for Lutherans.

So, I'm beginning our workshop. A gentleman asks me: "You are a preacher, right?? ... so, how do you decide what to talk about each week?" Well ... I tell him the same thing I've often said to you.

When I graduated ... my preaching professor puts his hands on my shoulder:

"Don, preaching isn't all that difficult. You have a story. Jesus has a story. Your people have a story.

When those 3 things come together ... out pops a sermon!! And, by the way ---- if you can't say it in 9 or 10 minutes ... don't punish people with your ignorance!!" He smiles.

So, I begin my talk. After a while ... some guy in the back row stands up:

"Hey, Rev ---- YOUR NINE MINUTES ARE UP!!"

Everyone laughs. It's amazing how a good laugh brings everyone together.

Early Saturday ... a few people gather for a mile walk. They are raising money for the organization.

I join them. One mile ... that will just take me a few minutes.

We are walking for a while ... and there is one older lady who is way behind ... walking alone.

I'm thinking to myself: Don, maybe you should practice what you preach. So, I go back ... and walk with her ---- very slowly. I find myself looking at my watch. "Don ---- what the hell are you looking at your watch for??? It's early. Your workshop isn't for 3 hours. Take your time, enjoy the company."

She is a fascinating lady.

"Don ... something I heard not long ago. Now --- I'm a Catholic. I go to church every day.

Anyway ---- here is the quote: RELIGION is for people who are afraid to go to hell.

SPIRITUALITY is for people who have already been there.

So true. Sometimes religion makes us afraid of our weaknesses and addictions ... and then there is an overdose of guilt. Spirituality gives us the freedom and the courage to face our weaknesses and those times when we feel like we are in "hell."

I've been quoting the Bible a bit more than usual lately. Hey --- it's about time!!

Some good words in Thessalonians today:

"Respect those who guide and instruct you. Be at peace among yourselves.

Warn the idle. Encourage the timid. Help the weak. Be patient.

Don't pay back wrong for wrong. Put all things to the test. Keep what is good. Avoid what is evil."

Good stuff. Why can't we just do this???

The gospel is about "judgment day."

There are two groups wanting to get into heaven --- God's eternal kingdom.

Jesus invites the first group in. They wonder: "Why are you taking us?"

Jesus responds: When I was hungry, you fed me. When I was naked you clothed me. When I was a stranger, you invited me into your home. They respond: When did we see you hungry and feed you?

When did we see you naked or a stranger and cloth you and welcome you???

Jesus answers: whenever you did these things to the least of my children ... you were doing it to me!!

The other group now wonders why they are not chosen. Jesus lets them know: When I was hungry, you didn't feed me ... naked, you didn't clothe me ... a stranger, you didn't welcome me. They are bewildered: we never saw you naked or a stranger or hungry. Again Jesus replies: Whenever you didn't do this to the least of my children ... you didn't do it to me.

You see? ----- true spirituality goes beyond just "believing" in something. Believing goes beyond the words ... true BELIEVING is what we DO about what we believe!!

The world is a complicated place. There is plenty of stress and anxiety to go around.

Thursday we gather to say "thanks."

THANKFUL. that we have a place like this to gather.

THANKFUL we have a spirit ... holding us together.

Speaking of addictions ...

I am often "addicted" to "finding God" ... so I have something to talk about on Sunday morning.

Well ... we need to be humble enough to "step back" and be reminded:

GOD HAS ALREADY FOUND US.

We just need to be humble enough to let him in.

Don Borling

All Saints Lutheran Church

13350 S. LaGrange Road Orland Park, IL 60462

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