

October 28, 2007

Joel 2

Luke 18

Eskimo Pie, Humble Pie, Pumpkin Pie, Bake Alaska

Tuesday afternoon I headed over to Peggy's to work on the next set of baby quilts – Peggy had a momentary lapse of sanity and cut enough squares for 8 quilts. That would be 11 x 11 x 8 or 968 quilt squares (if my math is correct which it often isn't.) While we are sewing and ironing our little hearts out, Peggy always shows me something funny she saved from *The Daily Show* or *The Colbert Report*, or the latest presentation or promotional material for the effort to pass legislation in the Congress for a Department of Peace; and last Tuesday, she played a segment from *Oprah*. You may have seen it as by the time Oprah saw this lecture on You Tube it had already been downloaded over a million times. It's a lecture at Carnegie Mellon by Professor Randy Pausch given to the 400 students and faculty and staff who showed up to hear what university tradition calls "the last lecture." The last lecture is given immediately before the first day of retirement begins and is an opportunity for the professor to share whatever she or she chooses about her or his career, subject matter or experience. What is unusual about Dr. Pausch's last lecture is that his retirement comes while he is in his forties (or fifties?) – because he is dying from pancreatic cancer. Despite throwing everything at that cancer, known and available, Dr. Pausch will be dead (barring some miracle) within the next two or three months.

So, his last lecture (which he consented to repeat on *Oprah* earlier this week.) Let me summarize.

Your childhood dreams are important.

He had a great childhood full of happiness and high hopes and parents who let him paint on his bedroom walls and encouraged fun.

Having fun every day is so important. Even though he is dying, he is having fun every day.

Be humble. Like his dad who won a bronze medal of honor during WW II but never thought to mention it to his wife in 53 years of marriage. Dr. Pausch recounts how after he got his PhD, his mother would tell people her son was a doctor but not the kind of doctor that helps people.

Be grateful. He shares how grateful he is for his parents, his wife, his children, his work and his colleagues, his opportunities.

The obstacles that are in your way to achieving your dreams are not there to prevent you from achieving them but to determine how much you truly want them.

Decide if you are going to be a Tigger or an Eyeore – Tiggers are positive enthusiastic hopeful energetic, work hard; Eyeore’s expect the worst of life and others (and each usually get what they expect.)

Apologize. An apology involves three parts – say you’re sorry; ask for forgiveness, and make it right as far as you can (the latter is what most people forget, he points out.)

Work hard. Don’t complain. If a situation is problematic, work harder.

And, if you live right and do the right thing, you won’t have to worry about achieving your dreams because your dreams will come to you.

Then Dr. Pausch explains that he was not giving this lecture for the staff and students at Carnegie Mellon or for the You Tube audience or for the Oprah audience. he was giving it for three people – and he showed a picture of his three young boys. This last lecture is his legacy to them.

Dr. Pausch and his last lecture have been traveling with me all week. It even interacted with the Pharisee and the tax collector in my mind. Usually, as I read this little story Jesus tells my challenge is not to be smug about not being smug. “Oh God I thank you that I am not like that Pharisee.....” It IS hard to be humble, to remember that everything we have has actually been given to us one way or another; to remember that grace comes unearned (always a bit of a sore point for those of us who tend to be good at following rules and those of us who work hard at being good.) The thing about Jesus is that no one IS better than another. When it comes to God’s love and mercy, we’re all in the same boat – equally needful, equally graced. It’s not about how good we are, it’s about how good God is.

Life is sacred and precious.

Humility. Everything we are and everything we have has actually been given to us one way or another. And, in the end, it’s not what we have but what we do with what we have that really counts. This Pharisee, this good religious man, has everything going for him and yet he can’t find it in his heart to feel compassion for the one who is struggling – he actually can’t even see that he IS struggling. Assumptions, conclusions, disconnection, dismissal. His religiosity cost him nothing nor gained him a thing in this instance.

Humility – Knowing that everything we are and everything we have has been given to us in one way or another and therefore it’s not about what we have but what we do with what we have.

Dr. Pausch could be bitter, angry, and morose; he could spend a lot of energy nursing the explanation of why this is SO NOT FAIR (and he would be right, of course); instead he is making the most of the gift of every day, every moment he has. He is living his legacy.

Today we begin what we officially call in the church year “stewardship season” – those several weeks in the Fall in which we intentionally turn toward thanksgiving for our gifts and decide how we will express our gratitude through the life and work and witness of our spiritual community.

I don’t want us to be like the Pharisee in our stewardship focus and stand around and tell God how great we are. In this season of pies, I would like us to start with humble pie. I would rather have stewardship be for us the opportunity to think of the gifts we have received and the legacy we wish to live and leave as those who have the privilege to be a part of this spiritual tradition and community.

So, since it’s always best to start with oneself before asking others to do something, let me share my gratitude for the legacy that I have inherited through the church:

The freedom of grace – I grew up such a perfectionist that it was about killing me by the time I was a young teenager – I could never do enough to feel like I had finally earned my way into someone’s graces – I could never study hard enough, get good enough grades, be polite enough, or thoughtful enough or good enough to feel like I **was** enough; while I always believed I was enough for God, I was deeply convinced that I was never good enough for anyone else nor would I ever be. And, trust me, it was not for lack of trying. When I found the church, or more accurately, when I found (through the church), Jesus and the good news of grace – that it wasn’t about how good I am but about how good God is, my life took a whole other route which allowed me to stop beating myself up for not being perfect and to start having the courage to open up to people and possibilities

Purpose and passion – the church gave me a framework to express this vision (of God’s radical hospitality) that I had in my heart from birth - a world where all are loved, cherished, free, full, compassionate, generous, joyfully connected – this vision of abundance; the church gave me a place to believe in the reality of this impossible vision and therefore the commitment to work toward it, to do my part no matter what is happening around me; my faith and my church keeps me from being small or living small.

Generosity and service makes for the happiest most satisfying life

Role models – because of the church, my life has been richly peopled with saints galore – saints like Emma Maddox who was bedridden all the time I knew her but who had such a heart for the world that she lived out from her bedroom;

Hope – my faith community has always reminded me that the world is in bigger hands than any of ours and so all will be well; I attribute my buoyant spirit in part to the week in and week out reminder in worship that God is the beginning and the end of us all and is with us every step of the way and we can count on that power to transform even the direst situations and most hopeless causes; this allows me to be happy and laugh and sing and play and dance – to be a Tigger, not an Eeyore

Your legacy? Next week.....