

Philippians 1:1-11
February 24, '19

“SWEETER MEMORIES”

AS YOU MIGHT IMAGINE, I’VE BEEN THINKING OF THIS PARTICULAR SERMON FOR QUITE SOME TIME.

I DECIDED IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA TO SAY SOMETHING MEMORABLE & MEANINGFUL & PREACH A SERMON THAT WAS DEEP & PROFOUND.

BUT THE MORE I THOUGHT ABOUT THAT, THE MORE I REALIZED YOU’D PROBABLY RATHER REMEMBER ME AS I REALLY WAS & SO I ABANDONED THE IDEA OF MEMORABLE, MEANINGFUL, DEEP & PROFOUND!

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, YOU HONORED ME IN A VERY SPECIAL WAY & TODAY I FEEL LIKE I HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO RETURN THE FAVOR.

THIS DAY IS MORE ABOUT YOU THAN IT IS ABOUT ME.

AND THIS SERVICE, OF COURSE, IS A SERVICE OF WORSHIP.

I STRUGGLED TO THINK OF WHAT A SERMON FOR THIS DAY SHOULD INCLUDE.

OBVIOUSLY, THIS IS A SERMON THAT A PREACHER DELIVERS ONLY ONCE.

IT'S NOT JUST A DEPARTURE SERMON – IT'S A “RETIREMENT SERMON.”

I FIGURED A GOOD PLACE TO START WOULD PROBABLY BE WHERE WE BEGIN A SEARCH FOR MOST ANYTHING THESE DAYS – I TURNED TO GOOGLE.

I TYPED IN “RETIREMENT SERMONS” AND, OF COURSE, THOUSANDS POPPED UP.

INTERESTINGLY, THOUGH, I DIDN'T FIND A SINGLE ONE THAT WORKED FOR ME – NOT EVEN A JOKE OR ILLUSTRATION.

MOST OF THE RETIREMENT SERMONS I FOUND FELL INTO ONE OF THREE CATEGORIES.

THERE WERE THOSE WHERE THE RETIRING MINISTER TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY OF HIS (AND ALL OF THEM *WERE* HIS'ES) – HIS LAST SERMON TO CRITICIZE EITHER THE CONGREGATION FOR THEIR FAILURES OVER THE YEARS OR HIS DENOMINATION FOR ITS DEPARTURE FROM WHAT HE FELT WAS THEOLOGICALLY CORRECT.

I FOUND THAT I COULDN'T REALLY RELATE TO THAT APPROACH IN MY FINAL SERMON.

THEN THERE WERE THOSE WHERE THE RETIREE USED A SCRIPTURE PASSAGE THAT PLACED HIM IN

**THE ROLE OF MOSES OR JOSHUA OR ONE OF THE
PROPHETS OR EVEN JESUS HIMSELF!**

**THAT APPROACH FELT A BIT UNCOMFORTABLE
TO ME.**

**THE THIRD CATEGORY FOUND THE DEPARTING
MINISTER USING HIS FINAL SERMON AS A CHANCE TO
“*COME CLEAN*” – TO EXPRESS ALL THE RADICAL
THEOLOGICAL, POLITICAL OR SOCIAL BELIEFS THAT
HE HADN’T PREVIOUSLY HAD THE COURAGE TO
EXPRESS.**

HE SAID THINGS HE’D ALWAYS WANTED TO SAY.

**WELL, THAT APPROACH DIDN’T WORK FOR ME
EITHER BECAUSE I HOPE – AFTER NEARLY 27 YEARS –
I’VE SAID EVERYTHING I EVER WANTED TO SAY TO
YOU!**

**HOWEVER...THAT APPROACH *DID* LEAD ME TO
GIVE THOUGHT TO A FEW THINGS I HAVE
INTENTIONALLY AVOIDED EVER REVEALING TO YOU
– THINGS THAT, NOW, I FINALLY CAN.**

**TO EXPLAIN ONE OF THOSE THINGS, I HAVE TO
OFFER ONE FINAL HOCKEY ANALOGY.**

**WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, ONE OF MY HOCKEY
HEROES WAS GLENN HALL – LONG-TIME ALL-STAR
GOALIE OF THE CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS.**

**I READ AN ARTICLE ABOUT HALL THAT WAS
ENTITLED “GUTS!”**

**I STILL REMEMBER THE “GUTS!” WITH AN
EXCLAMATION MARK PRINTED IN BIG, BOLD RED
LETTERS.**

**WITHIN THE ARTICLE, HALL SAID THAT EVEN
AFTER MORE THAN 15 YEARS OF BEING A NATIONAL**

HOCKEY LEAGUE GOALIE, BEFORE EVERY GAME & BETWEEN PERIODS OF EVERY GAME – HE VOMITED.

AS A 13- OR 14-YEAR-OLD GOALIE MYSELF WHEN I READ THAT, IT BROUGHT A SENSE OF COMFORT - IF GLENN HALL COULD BE THAT NERVOUS BEFORE A GAME, IT WAS OKAY THAT I WAS.

LITTLE DID I KNOW AT THE TIME THAT THE LESSON OF GLENN HALL WOULD TRANSFER INTO ANOTHER, FAR MORE IMPORTANT, AREA OF MY LIFE.

FOR GLENN HALL, UNTIL THE VERY END OF HIS CAREER, THE BUTTERFLIES, THE OVERWHELMING NERVOUSNESS & THE UPSET STOMACH NEVER LEFT HIM.

I CAN FINALLY TELL YOU THAT, LIKE GLENN HALL, EVERY SINGLE SUNDAY FOR MORE THAN 40 YEARS, I STEP INTO THE CHANCEL WITH

BUTTERFLIES, OVERWHELMING NERVOUSNESS & AN UPSET STOMACH.

I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT THE NORMAL NERVOUSNESS THAT A LITURGIST FEELS OR THE BUTTERFLIES SOMEONE EXPERIENCES WHEN THEY STAND UP TO SPEAK TO A GROUP.

I'M TALKING ABOUT TOTAL, ABSOLUTE, COMPLETE *"FEEL-LIKE-I'M-GOING-TO-VOMIT"* TERROR!

IF I'D KNOWN 40 YEARS AGO THAT MY FINAL SERMON WOULD BE NO EASIER IN THAT REGARD THAN MY FIRST ONE WAS, I'M NOT SURE I WOULD HAVE HAD THE "GUTS" TO PURSUE THIS CALLING.

SO THERE IT IS & I HOPE I HAVE FOOLED AT LEAST SOME OF YOU INTO THINKING OTHERWISE OF ME FOR THE PAST 2 ½ DECADES.

**I HOPE I'VE PUT *YOU* AT EASE BY PRETENDING
THAT *I* AM AT EASE IN SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP
BECAUSE I ASSURE YOU THAT, NOT FOR A SECOND,
HAVE I BEEN!**

**NO, I *DON'T* VOMIT BEFORE EACH SERVICE, BUT
I'M NEVER FAR *FROM* IT!**

**SOMETHING ELSE THAT I HAVE INTENTIONALLY
AVOIDED REVEALING TO YOU IS THAT I REALLY
DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT A LOT OF THINGS THAT
ONE WOULD EXPECT I *WOULD* KNOW SOMETHING
ABOUT.**

**SINCE I USED ONE FINAL HOCKEY ILLUSTRATION,
I'LL ALSO USE ONE FINAL "MAC" ILLUSTRATION.**

**FOR THOSE WHO DON'T RECOGNIZE THE NAME -
MAC WAS MY MENTOR IN MINISTRY.**

**VIRTUALLY EVERYTHING I KNOW ABOUT BEING A
MINISTER, I LEARNED FROM MAC.**

**MAC WAS A MASTER AT PRETENDING HE WAS
VERY LEARNED IN PARTICULAR AREAS WHEN THOSE
WHO WERE CLOSE TO HIM, KNEW THAT, IN REALITY,
HE WAS ABSOLUTELY CLUELESS ABOUT THE
SUBJECT!**

**MAC TAUGHT ME THAT PEOPLE EXPECTED HIM –
AS A MINISTER – TO KNOW CERTAIN THINGS & SO HE
SAID THEM IN A WAY THAT MADE PEOPLE BELIEVE
THAT HE *DID!***

**ON THIS LAST SUNDAY WITH YOU, I THINK I CAN
FINALLY COME CLEAN & TELL YOU THE TRUTH
ABOUT MYSELF FOR THOSE I MAY HAVE FOOLED
OVER THE YEARS.**

**WHEN IT COMES TO THINGS LIKE BASIC
CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY, CHURCH HISTORY,
CHRISTIAN ETHICS & BIBLE CONTENT, I'M PROBABLY
MORE CLUELESS THAN ANY MINISTER YOU'LL EVER
MEET.**

**IN FACT, MOST OF WHAT I KNOW, I'VE LEARNED
FROM MY FAMILY!**

**I'VE LEARNED MORE ABOUT CHRISTIAN
THEOLOGY FROM DAVID, MORE ABOUT CHURCH
HISTORY FROM DEREK, MORE ABOUT CHRISTIAN
ETHICS FROM DREW & MOST OF WHAT I KNOW
ABOUT THE BIBLE FROM EMMA SUE!**

**AND MOST OF WHAT I KNOW ABOUT PRAYER,
MISSIONS, SERVICE, LOVE & COMPASSION I'VE
LEARNED FROM ALL OF YOU.**

**AND THAT LEADS ME – FINALLY – TO OUR
SCRIPTURE PASSAGE FOR THIS MORNING.**

**I REMEMBER IN A SEMINARY CLASS THE
PROFESSOR TOOK A SURVEY OF ALL THE STUDENTS,
ASKING OUR FAVORITE BOOK OF THE BIBLE.**

**THE WINNER – BY A LANDSLIDE – WAS
PHILIPPIANS.**

**A FEW YEARS LATER, I READ A SURVEY OF
THOUSANDS OF MINISTERS THAT REVEALED THE
SAME THING.**

**I THINK THE REASON FOR THAT IS THAT THE
CHURCH IN PHILIPPI WAS PAUL’S FAVORITE CHURCH.**

**IT WAS A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO WERE ALWAYS
THERE FOR PAUL.**

**THEY SUPPORTED HIM AND STOOD BY HIS SIDE IN
TIMES OF GREAT DIFFICULTY.**

I THINK THAT MAKES PHILIPPIANS A LOGICAL FAVORITE OF SEMINARIANS & MINISTERS BECAUSE EVERY MINISTER DREAMS OF SERVING A CHURCH LIKE THE ONE IN PHILIPPI.

UNFORTUNATELY, THERE ARE FAR TOO FEW MINISTERS WHO EVER EXPERIENCE A CHURCH LIKE THAT.

I COUNT MYSELF AS ONE OF THOSE FORTUNATE FEW.

YOU HAVE BEEN MY PHILIPPI.

AT THE BEGINNING OF PAUL'S LETTER TO THEM, HE SAYS, "*I THANK MY GOD EVERY TIME I REMEMBER YOU, CONSTANTLY PRAYING WITH JOY IN EVERY ONE OF MY PRAYERS FOR ALL OF YOU, BECAUSE OF YOUR SHARING IN THE GOSPEL FROM THE FIRST DAY UNTIL NOW.*"

**PAUL LOVES THESE PEOPLE BECAUSE HE KNOWS
THEY LOVE HIM & HE'S SO THANKFUL FOR WHAT
THEY HAVE MEANT IN HIS LIFE.**

**I CAN THINK OF NO BETTER PASSAGE TO
CONSIDER ON THIS DAY.**

**THAT'S WHO YOU HAVE BEEN TO ME AND, LIKE
PAUL, I'M SO VERY THANKFUL FOR WHAT YOU HAVE
MEANT IN MY LIFE.**

**I HAVE EVERY CONFIDENCE THAT THAT'S WHO
YOU WILL CONTINUE TO BE IN THE FUTURE.**

**AS I'VE BEEN THINKING OF MY TIME HERE &
WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR YOU AS A CHURCH, I
KEEP THINKING OF MY OLD TOYOTA COROLLA.**

**SOME OF YOU REMEMBER MY LITTLE RED
COROLLA.**

I HAD IT FOR MORE THAN 15 YEARS.

IT HAD A BIG DENT IN THE FRONT FENDER, THE RADIO WAS MISSING, THE CRANK WINDOWS NO LONGER CRANKED & I HAD LOGGED MORE THAN 170,000 ON IT.

YOU MAY ALSO REMEMBER THAT MY OLD COROLLA WAS STOLEN – FROM MY DRIVEWAY!

I WENT OUT ONE WEDNESDAY MORNING TO GO TO THE MEN’S BREAKFAST & MY OLD COROLLA WASN’T THERE.

I CALLED DENNIE (OUR SEXTON) HERE AT CHURCH AND ASKED HIM TO LOOK IN THE PARKING LOT TO SEE IF I’D LEFT IT AT CHURCH THE NIGHT BEFORE AND WALKED HOME.

HE SAID IT WASN’T THERE & I SAID, “WELL, DENNIE - I THINK SOMEONE STOLE MY OLD COROLLA.”

SURE ENOUGH, THAT’S WHAT HAPPENED.

**WHY ANYONE WOULD HAVE WANTED IT, I'LL
NEVER KNOW!**

**I EVENTUALLY SETTLED WITH THE INSURANCE
COMPANY & GOT ANOTHER CAR – A BIGGER CAR, A
NEWER CAR, A FAR BETTER CAR BY ANYONE'S
ESTIMATION.**

**MY NEW CAR HAD STUFF ON IT THAT I'D ONLY
SEEN IN *OTHER* PEOPLE'S CARS.**

**THERE WERE AUTOMATED THINGS THAT I NEVER
EVEN KNEW EXISTED.**

**IT COULD DO THINGS THAT I NEVER DREAMED A
CAR COULD DO.**

**AFTER I LOST MY OLD COROLLA & GOT MY NEW
CAR, I WAS OFTEN ASKED THE SAME QUESTION.**

**IT WAS ASKED AFTER A MONTH – SIX MONTHS –
EVEN A YEAR AFTER MY OLD COROLLA WAS GONE.**

**THE QUESTION WAS THIS: “*IF IT WAS POSSIBLE –
WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO TRADE YOUR NEW CAR –
EVEN UP – FOR YOUR OLD COROLLA?*”**

**FOR MORE THAN A YEAR, MY ANSWER TO THAT
QUESTION WAS ALWAYS THE SAME – “*IN A
HEARTBEAT!*”**

**YOU SEE, THAT OLD COROLLA WAS SO
COMFORTABLE TO ME.**

I LOVED THAT CAR.

IT WAS RELIABLE – IT WAS DEPENDABLE.

I HATED LOSING IT.

**IT TOOK ME A LONG TIME, BUT EVENTUALLY I
REALIZED HOW FOOLISH I WAS BEING IN WANTING
MY OLD COROLLA BACK.**

**IT WAS FOOLISH BECAUSE I HAD TO ADMIT MY
NEW CAR WAS SO MUCH BETTER THAN MY OLD
COROLLA.**

**IT WAS ABLE TO DO SO MANY THINGS THAT –
SIMPLY BECAUSE OF ITS AGE – MY OLD COROLLA
COULD NEVER DO.**

**AND I ALSO REALIZED THAT IN FINALLY
ADMITTING THAT I WAS GLAD TO HAVE MY NEW CAR
DIDN'T MEAN I WAS ABANDONING MY LOVE FOR MY
OLD COROLLA.**

**WHAT IT HAD DONE FOR ME WOULD NEVER
CHANGE.**

**I WOULD ALWAYS HAVE WONDERFUL, FOND
MEMORIES OF MY OLD COROLLA.**

**I WASN'T BEING UNFAITHFUL TO IT BY BEING
DELIGHTED TO HAVE MY NEW CAR.**

I HOPE YOU UNDERSTAND WHY THE EXPERIENCE WITH MY OLD COROLLA MADE ME THINK OF MY ROLE HERE AND THE FUTURE ON WHICH YOU ARE ABOUT TO EMBARK.

WHEN I THINK OF WHY I'M RETIRING, I COME UP WITH 12 REASONS.

11 OF THOSE REASONS ARE SITTING RIGHT HERE – I'LL SPEND ALL DAY WITH 1 OF THEM, BE RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER FROM 2 OF THEM, 6 MILES AWAY FROM 4 OF THEM & 3 HOURS CLOSER TO THE OTHER 4.

AND ALL OF YOU ARE THE 12TH REASON I'M RETIRING BECAUSE AN OLD COROLLA MAY BE COMFORTABLE & DEPENDABLE BUT A NEWER MODEL IS CAPABLE OF DOING SO MUCH MORE.

FINALLY, IN ALL OF MY THINKING ABOUT THIS CONCLUDING SERMON, A PARTICULAR SONG KEPT POPPING INTO MY HEAD.

I WASN'T SURE WHY IT WAS THERE, BUT THEN I SEEMED TO RECALL THAT I HAD USED IT ONCE BEFORE IN A SERMON.

AND THEN, IT FINALLY HIT ME.

I USED THE SONG IN THE VERY FIRST SERMON I EVER PREACHED.

IT WAS A BACCALAUREATE SERMON I DELIVERED AT THE HIGH SCHOOL I HAD ATTENDED.

IT WAS AT THE END OF MY FIRST YEAR IN SEMINARY.

THE SONG THAT KEPT CREEPING INTO MY HEAD OVER THE PAST FEW WEEKS THAT I HAD USED IN THAT VERY FIRST SERMON IS A RATHER OBSCURE

TODD RUNDGREN SONG (WHICH MANY OF YOU MAY CONSIDER REDUNDANT).

IT'S ENTITLED "SWEETER MEMORIES" & THAT WAS, AS I RECALL, THE TITLE I USED FOR THAT VERY FIRST SERMON SOME 43 YEARS AGO.

WITHIN THE SONG ARE THESE LYRICS THAT I'VE BEEN THINKING OF FOR THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS:

THERE'S A LIFE FULL OF PAIN

AND A LIFE FULL OF GLEE

SO YOU SEE THAT THE RAIN

DOESN'T MEAN MUCH TO ME

FOR I KNOW THAT IT PAYS

MAKING LIGHT OF LIVING'S TRAGEDIES

MAKE YOUR DAYS BE AS BRIGHT

TAKE THE GOOD – LEAVE THE BAD

TAKE A FEW OF THESE, THE SWEETER MEMORIES

DON'T FORGET THEM PLEASE, THE SWEETER MEMORIES

***TO SET YOUR MIND AT EASE, THE TRUEST REMEDIES
ARE THE SWEETER MEMORIES.***

**FOR NEARLY 27 YEARS, YOU HAVE BEEN MY
PHILIPPI.**

**YOU HAVE ENABLED ME TO MAKE LIGHT OF
LIVING'S TRAGEDIES FOR I KNOW THAT THE TRUEST
REMEDIES ARE THE SWEETER MEMORIES & YOU
HAVE PROVIDED THEM FOR ME IN ABUNDANCE.**

I'LL TAKE THE GOOD & LEAVE THE BAD.

**AS PAUL SAYS TO THE PHILIPPIANS, THIS OLD
COROLLA SAYS TO YOU:**

***"...THIS IS MY PRAYER, THAT YOUR LOVE MAY
OVERFLOW MORE AND MORE WITH KNOWLEDGE AND
FULL INSIGHT TO HELP YOU TO DETERMINE WHAT IS
BEST, SO THAT IN THE DAY OF CHRIST YOU MAY BE
PURE AND BLAMELESS, HAVING PRODUCED THE***

***HARVEST OF RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT COMES THROUGH
JESUS CHRIST FOR THE GLORY AND PRAISE OF GOD.”***

**IN GOD’S PERFECT TIMING, THERE IS ALREADY A
NEW MODEL BEING PREPARED TO REPLACE YOUR
OLD, WORN-OUT COROLLA.**

**IF YOU ARE AS KIND, COMPASSIONATE, LOVING
AND PATIENT WITH HER – OR HIM – AS YOU HAVE
BEEN WITH ME, THEY, TOO, WILL ONE DAY, WITH
GREAT JOY, REFER TO YOU AS THEIR PHILIPPIANS.**

AMEN.

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