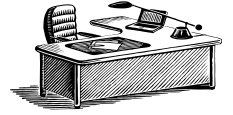


From the Pastor's Desk

"Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, 'My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.'" So he went with him." Mark 5:22-24a



When I think of the month of February, there are several images that come to mind. The first is that we are still in the grip of winter, but it is the last month that it has a firm grip upon us. In March, there is a hope of spring knocking on our door as warmer weather can begin melting the snow. This winter we were blessed with warm weather in December. But January brought the arctic air and snowstorms. I am sure we have more of those days ahead. But right in the middle of the month, there is a day to warm our hearts, "Valentines Day". It is a day to celebrate love. Husbands and boyfriends find their way to the florist shop to buy some beautiful flowers to hint at the beauty and joy their wife or girlfriend brings into their lives. Often along with flowers are boxes of chocolate and cards that declare feelings of love, which men leave to the poet to express for them. If the weather and busy schedules permit, there is a special dinner, just for the couple. Often rings are purchased, and a marriage proposal is given at a Valentine's dinner in a favorite restaurant. Love is in the air, no matter the temperature outside.



This year there is a different kind of love in the air as Ash Wednesday falls on Valentines Day. In the midst of the flowers, chocolates and "I love you" comes the stark words of Ash Wednesday, "Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return." These are the words that are spoken to each person, who comes forward following a litany of



confession of sins. Pastor Bill or I dip our fingers in ashes and make the sign of the cross on your forehead and declare, "Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return." This is a stark reminder that we are sinners and we will one day take our last breath on earth and die. Not only will we die, but we will one day become dust once again. That reminder can put quite a damper on the celebration of love between a husband and wife and a young couple. But it does put our love for one another in perspective. Our days are numbered. If our hearts are filled with love for another and we desire to share our joys and frustrations, our challenges and our successes with the other, then we need to share our heart, express our love for the other in words and deeds. For we know tomorrow isn't guaranteed.

As I thought about us gathering to worship on Ash Wednesday, with dark ashen crosses upon our foreheads on the celebration of love on Valentine's day, I thought of our Lord's love for us and the story of Jairus, Jesus and Jairus' little daughter.

Jesus is still in the beginning of his ministry. Jesus has been traveling from village to village, teaching people in the

synagogues about his Father's love and his Father's kingdom. When Jesus finished the time of teaching, he took time to heal loved ones that people of the village brought to him to see. Jesus healed those who were sick with illnesses that were debilitating. Jesus made the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, the blind to see. Jesus even cast out demons setting people free from their bondage to the demons. The word spread about this wonderful teacher with the authority and power to heal people.

Jesus had just come across the Sea of Galilee where he had cast out the legion of demons of the Gerasene Demoniac. When Jesus came ashore, the people recognized him immediately. They began to gather around to listen to Jesus. Before Jesus can begin teaching, Jairus, a leader of the local synagogue, comes begging Jesus to follow him to bring healing to his little daughter who is standing at death's door. Jesus follows Jairus to his house. When Jesus arrives, people are crying and shouting laments over the death of the little girl. But Jesus doesn't say, "It is too late. I'm sorry." Jesus chases out the people.



Then Jesus takes the hand of the little girl in his hand and declares, "Little Girl, get up!" The little girl opens her eyes and she feels healthy and strong as she stares into the eyes of Jesus, feeling his love surrounding her. She grabs hold of Jesus' hand and stands up.

Jesus has the same love for you as he has for the little girl. Jesus saw her in death's grip and Jesus released death's grip and restored her life. As we look upon the ashen crosses on our foreheads this Valentine's Day, Jesus envelopes you with his love and grace. Jesus also knows that we are dust and to dust we shall return. Jesus also knows that we are in the grip of sin and death. Jesus takes you by the hand and declares to you rise up in my love and grace. "I will not let remain in the grip of sin and death. I have entered into the brokenness of sin and the ashes of death. I have defeated their powers. I take your hand into mine and I lift you up into my love and my Father's love for you. I remove the grip of sin and guilt and I declare you forgiven. Your sins are no more. Your sins and guilt fall away from you, like broken chains. I have defeated the power of death. You will always be remembered, for I give you the gift of eternal life and you will live with me and my Father and all those I have called into my love and we will continue to create more memories of love in my Father's house." This Valentines Day is truly a celebration of love.

Pastor Randy



WANDERINGS AND WONDERINGS



I walked into a “box store” the other day to do some shopping. As I was wandering, I passed the electronic department, and they had probably two dozen TV’s lighting up the area ... all the same movie ... one of the “Cars” movies.

As I passed the TVs to do my shopping, I glanced over towards them, not to watch “Cars”, but to listen to a sound that was so rare and so beautiful that it made me stop where I was, frozen to that spot on the floor.

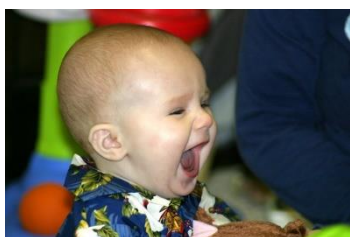


The sound was that of a child, laughing. It was pure ... clean ... clear ...

contagious.

Have you ever tasted spring water right out of the ground? The taste is amazing - cold ... pure ... clean. That was what this laughter sounded like. Have you ever felt a sudden and unexpected cool breeze flow over your face on a hot and humid day? That was how this laughter sounded.

It was sweet and simple ... free and unembarrassed. It was innocent. It was more than happiness - richer, fuller, more complete; it was... joy.



So I made my way toward the laughter and there was a little boy, about five years old or so, standing there, his coat unzipped and barely hanging unto his shoulders, his stocking cap perched atop his head, his cheeks flushed with warmth, his eyes wide and bright and glued to the television, watching “Cars.”

If you had seen him, you would have said that he beamed. It was as though light was radiating from all around him, so complete was his joy. And he was laughing - laughing as though the whole world was laughing with him.

It warmed my heart ... brought tears to my eyes ... I was being bathed in his wonderful, innocent joy.



And I was not the only one affected by this - others, all adults, were standing around, watching and listening. And

one by one, they, too began to smile ... even to laugh a little as they became infected with his joy.

Had one of you wandered by at that moment, you might have noticed a tear or two in the corners of my eyes, I might have told that I was still recovering from the bitter cold outside. But that wasn’t it. It was joy. And it caught me by surprise. It was a gift from God, right there in the store.

Friends, can we, just for a moment, put away our anger and fear, our cynicism and doubt, our annoyance and exasperation. Let us set aside our bitterness, our resentment, and our indignation ...and let us open ourselves to the possibility of joy.



We are at an odd juncture in the Jesus story – a month ago we were celebrating a baby in a manger ... our God in the flesh and blood in our world. The last few weeks we are exploring the beginning of Jesus’ ministry – we understand the magnitude of what is going on, but it is not hard to read, observe, realize the confusion and questions of those around Jesus. And around the corner, Lent begins ... somber, sad, and tragic.

Let us look upon the “Holy One of God” and remember the message he brings to us - that we are loved and accepted, that our sins are forgiven, that the kingdom of God is at hand, that our past has been stamped approved and that our future is free and open.

Let us lift our spirits and our voices in praise of God. Let the joy that God has planted as a seed in each of us, grow, bloom, and overflow out of us and into those around us.



And, finally, friends, let us laugh, loudly and unselfconsciously, freely and openly, as though the whole world were laughing with us.

We heard these words, not long ago, let them stick with us throughout the whole year – in our hearts and our lives ... **“For, behold, I bring you good news of great joy. Unto you is born, this day, in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ, the Lord.”**

Wanderings and Wonderings,
Pastor Bill Peters