

"WHERE IS YOUR HOME?"

A Sermon By

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INTRODUCTION

Children have a way of saying some of the most outrageous things. I read about a family that has a little ritual they follow whenever one of their pet goldfish dies. They gather in the bathroom and the three year old boy holds the "deceased" goldfish while his five year old sister says a little prayer. Then the three year old boy drops the fish into the toilet bowl and his older sister flushes it away to heaven.

One day, during one of these family rituals, the daughter asked her father if her grandfather who had passed away the year before was also up in heaven. When her father responded, "Yes...why yes he is", the three year old son asked, "And daddy...who flushed him?" Ah, yes...children are amazing and delightful.

DEVELOPMENT

Last week we focussed on the family and raised the question as to "what makes a family". Today, on this Father's Day, we lift up another question. "Where is your home?"

But let me work in to this by first saluting our dads. It's not easy being a dad. Paul Dickson captured some of the difficulties and some of the problems in parenting in his little volume, The Official Rules At Home. Among others he discusses these three immutable Laws...Laws which he says are simply corollaries of Murphy's Famous Law, that...

"If anything can go wrong, it will. If anything can't go wrong, it will anyway."

Now the first of these he calls Ballweg's Discovery that "Whenever there is a flat surface, someone will find something to put on it". And it's true. The second, not unlike unto it, is known as Smith's Fourth Law of Inertia. "A body at rest tends to watch television". Yes, also true. The third he calls Parent's Law. "By the time you're right, you're dead". Some can relate to all three, but most of us will say "amen" to the third and last one I'm sure.

OUR HOME IS WITH GOD

Where is your home? That's a question that grows out of our lesson for today that is taken from Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians. He is most eloquent in his contention and his insistence that this world is not our home. Our home, he reminds us, is with God. "At home with the Lord".

In other words, we are a pilgrim people. From birth til death we are simply passing through this world. Nothing's permanent. Nothing remains the way it was. And certainly watching our children grow up reminds us of that. We'd like to capture these magic moments in the lives of our kids and hold on to them but life is a moving stream. That's the value of those photographs we love to take and to look at. Kodack reminds us of that time and again. They capture the moment and let us hold on to the past a bit longer...but even before the print is dry the experience is gone...over...nothing stands still.

If there's one comment I hear from the older members of this church it's apt to be "how quickly the years have flown by". Why, I even find myself on occasion voicing that refrain. Time flies. "Tempus fugit"...as the Romans put it.

Those of you who are Knick fans will remember Derek Harper. He went back to Texas to play for the Mavericks. I remember reading back in the winter how he dribbled the final six seconds off the clock in a game because he thought his team was one point up. But in actuality, the game was tied and the Dallas Mavericks ended up losing in overtime.

"Dribble, dribble, dribble go the minutes" wrote Jay Strack...."The hours, the days, the years of our lives".

It really could get depressing if we lingered on it. But it does impress upon us the importance of making every moment count. In other words, since life is passing by so quickly hadn't we better focus on those things that really matter and stop the dribbling. Yes - carpe diem. Seize the present opportunity.

MAKE THOSE MOMENTS COUNT

American poet, Nicki Giovanni, has written an essay entitled, The Time Machine. It comes from a comic book that she remembers from her childhood. But now the story is based in the 21st Century. One evening a man walks in to a doctor's office and waits to be seen. No one is there, but he notices a card on a table beside a machine. A sign says,

"Fill out this card and insert it into the machine"

Which he does after filling it out and reading the instructions carefully. This machine begins to make a sound...rumbling and humming and then after a few seconds it prints out a response which says,

"You will be struck by lightning and killed tomorrow morning".

The man looks up...somewhat puzzled....at this machine and happens to notice a button which reads "DEATH AVERTED". So he pushes that button and the machine begins to rumble and hum a second time. This time it prints out another card which says,

"You will survive the lightning strike, but three years from now your business will fail and you will commit suicide...."

The man decides to push this "DEATH AVERTED" button a second time and the machine repeats the cycle. This time the printout reads,

"You will survive the business failure, but you and your family will be killed while traveling to a vacation site."

Well...by now the man is obsessed with the machine. He continues to play late into the night with it...pushing the "DEATH AVERTED" button over and over again, but while doing this he fails to notice the dark clouds gathering in the sky outside. He fails to hear the wind blowing through the windows. He fails to hear the thunder rumbling overhead. And at two minutes after midnight, he is killed by lightning while pushing the "DEATH AVERTED" button for about the 25th time. He had become so obsessed with the game that he ended up blocking out what was going on around him.

Have you ever suddenly "looked up" and said to yourself, "Why...can it possibly be December already...seems like we just celebrated Christmas". Or, "Can this be his 6th birthday...seems like only yesterday when he was born!"

Life dribbles...dribbles...and dribbles away. Who among us has not become so obsessed with meeting our responsibilities that we have passed by and ignored some of those important tasks that God has put into our hands?

Tim Kimmel is a writer who has six individually framed pictures across the upper shelf of his roll-top desk. The picture over on the left shows the Jameson Memorial Hospital in New Castle, Pennsylvania where he was born. The picture on the right is of a six-foot-high granite monument that stands in the middle of the Graceland Cemetery just outside the same city of Newcastle. You can't miss the name "Kimmel" carved on its side. The earth beneath that monument conceals the remains of several generations of his family. The four pictures that sit between these two outer pictures are of his wife, Darcy, and his three children - Karis, Cody and Shiloh. He writes,

"What we do for a living has a way of absorbing our attention. Its demands are so great and its ego satisfaction is so intoxicating that it can easily become the focus of our lives. I love my work, but I don't want it to become the heart of my existence...my reason for living.

That's why I have those pictures strategically placed on my desk. When I look up from my studies, I come 'eye-ball to eye-ball' with a reminder of my purpose. And stealing a peak at them several times a day has a way of keeping my work and my life in proper balance and good perspective. In the brief moment it takes me to scan them I receive a message in the cluttered back rooms of my brain.

The pictures say, 'Don't you forget, Tim...this is where you checked in - the hospital...and this is where you'll one day check-out - the cemetery, and these four people here in the middle are why you are here!'

We need to remember that this world is not our real home. Our time here is quite brief. We're just passing through and it is so important that we not miss what is really important as we make our way through this world. We need to stop dribbling and make every moment and every movement count more than it does.

LIFE: ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

But now there is a second thing that all of this should be reminding us of and that is that life is about relationships. Unfortunately, you can't tell it by the way most of us spend our time, but life isn't about cars and houses and boats and ball games and health clubs and trips and all of those many things we spend our hard-earned money on. All of these things are here for a moment or two and then they're gone. Only one thing in the world is eternal and that is people. And this is where we need to put our attention: on people. Human relationships are more precious than anything else. Let me impress that upon your thinking.

C. R. Snyder, in his little book, The Psychology of Hope, tells the reader of something he witnessed on two separate plane trips. First, there was Jenny and her mom. Snyder judged Jenny to be about three years old. This was her first plane trip and her mother prepared her well for it...describing the loud engine noises at take-off and how they would be pushed back in their seats. Her mom said,

"And I'll hold your hand...."

Jenny and her mother were both excited and chatted away throughout the entire flight. Mom enjoyed how Jenny experienced things for the first time in her young life. She even took Jenny for a walk around the plane...all the while answering her questions and pointing out things to her. Jenny got a bit scared when the landing gear went down, but her mother comforted her with a big hug and a simply explanation of what was going on. Jenny and her mother were clearly connected and trusted each other.

Now, at the other extreme, writes Snyder, consider the interaction of three year old Teddy and his mother. Mom put Teddy into the seat next to hers and after fastening his seat belt said,

"Now...just sit there and be
quiet...mummy is going to
sleep"

Which she did. Teddy was obedient, but his big eyes and trembling little hands revealed his fear at several points in the flight. His mother was oblivious to what was going on in Teddy's mind, however. If there were things he wanted, one would never know because he sat quietly throughout the entire flight. No words and no touches were exchanged. Teddy did not share whatever thoughts he had about things he wanted to do or to learn. In many ways, he was flying "alone".

Such an example makes you wonder how many children are flying "alone" through life? Undivided attention is one of the greatest gifts a parent can give his or her child...regardless of what other advantages one offers up.

Kirk Douglas, the actor, shared his life with us in his autobiography, The Son of the Ragman. He grew up in Amsterdam, New York...up in the Mohawk valley not far from my hometown. His parents were immigrants from Russia. His father collected rags on the streets of Amsterdam, the same streets where I sold Fuller Brushes the summer of 1949. Kirk Douglas recalls that his mother was warm and supportive as she did her best to adjust to life in a new land, but he remembers his father as stern, strict, cold and untrusting. He never received any words of encouragement from his father....no pat on the back, or a hug... his father remained distant and a very private sort of man. But then Kirk Douglas shares this story about his father.

Back in the mid-thirties...one evening at Amsterdam High School, Douglas had a major role speaking, dancing and singing in a play. He knew his mother would be there, but doubted whether his father would bother to come and to his amazement and great surprise, about half way through the program, he caught a view of his father standing in the back of the high school auditorium.

After completing the evening's program, he wanted his father to come up and congratulate him on a job well done, but true to his fashion, his father wann't able to say much. Instead, he asked his young son if he'd like to stop and get a five-cent ice cream cone on the way home. As Kirk Douglas reflects back over all his awards in life, he prizes that five-cent ice cream cone even more than the Oscar in his home. It was not the cone, of course...but the attention that counted. The world ...this world...is not our home. Time is rapidly getting away from us. The meaning of life is found in our relationships. One more thing.

OUR MOST IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP IS WITH GOD

I believe that our most important relationship is with God. St. Paul says that the purpose of our lives - whether in this world or in the next - is to please God. The primary relationship we are to build is with God. We are establishing bonds with one another and with God that are not just for this world, but for that world that is beyond this.

And how do we go about doing this? We do it by living in the moment, in the here and the now....and by looking to those things that are eternal and not wasting time and energy on those things that are temporal. How did Paul put it,

"...because we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal".

(II Corinthians 4: 18)

CLOSING

Fred Rogers, whose television show for children has long been a favorite, gave the Baccalaureate Address at Boston University a year or two ago and in his talk, his address, he told a story about a boy who had written him a letter. The boy told of his troubled childhood and of his severe abuse. Often this boy would sneak into the living room and often against the wishes of his parents, turn on the television to watch "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood". The boy whose name was Tony wrote Mr. Rogers and told him that he considered him to be his best friend. Tony was placed in a foster home and is now writing a book and parts of it he sends to Mr. Rogers. Tony wrote of his foster parents,

"My dad has shown me that if I take care of the present, I can take care of forever at the same time."

Not bad....as a matter of fact, that just about sums it all up. I think that's a good message to take home with us on this Father's Day. "If we take proper care of the present, we'll be taking care of forever at the same time...." For, this world is not our home...we're just passing through. All of us need to make better use of our time and our personal gifts. Remember, carpe diem. Seize the present opportunity. Leave room and space and time to work on our relationships with others...., fathers, family, friends and most important of all - GOD.

"Yes....if I take care of the present, I can take care of 'forever' at the same time...."

PRAYER

Make us sensitive to Your present and to Your nearness in these moments, O God. Wrestle with us...in the hidden corners of our lives...help us to overcome those darker impulses of our souls....bring us out into the light and love of Your presence....remembering that our relationships with others are most important...that we are merely pilgrims here on earth... that times flys by....and that one day we shall be "home" with You in the great Kingdom of light and love. In the spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen.