

Dr. Joe Jursa's Sermon

Sharing God's Love – Truly this man was the son of God - Mark 15:33-39

³³ When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ³⁴ At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ³⁵ When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." ³⁶ And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." ³⁷ Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹ Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

You and I happen to be people with a great truth to reveal to the world. We know from personal experience that Jesus is the son of God and as such has available to him all those things he claimed during his life, including life eternal. But the truth be told, sometimes we are not so good at letting others know. I think in part that comes from wanting everything to be right before we share. No one wants to be embarrassed, and making sure everything is just right in our eyes makes for a greater chance of success or at least with not being embarrassed.

But lest we somehow think we are God's only plan for revealing his son Jesus Christ, one of the first people to express to the world the truth about Jesus was the centurion who watched him die. And when this man who witnessed death on a regular basis watched as Jesus died his conclusion that he spoke for the world to hear that day. "Truly this man was God's Son!"

I have this feeling after the centurion's startling revelation of his opinion he took some harassment over it. Jesus was not popular and certainly no Jew could really be the son of any god as far as the Roman's were concerned. But like it or not the words of the centurion, his heartfelt declaration on that day about Jesus being the son of God, are there for all to see.

St. Paul, you and I as members declare in our vision statement that we are about: Sharing God's Love, Changing Lives and Serving the Community.

The first thing we should be about as members of St. Paul is Sharing God's love. Are we taking it seriously? Maybe you are good at sharing your faith with another and maybe you are not. But either way are you working at getting better?

The centurion called out in wonder at the way in which Jesus died and could not help but declare Jesus to be the son of God. From time to time we may be so overcome with the closeness of Christ or the presence of the Holy Spirit that we to blurt out, thou art the Christ, the son of God. But what are you doing on a day in and day out basis to get better at sharing God's love?

Paul likens the Christian's life to a race. A race whose course is not finished until God calls us home. Maybe like every exceptional athlete we need to consider the importance of practice and repetition. Tiger Woods said, you can always become better. As a child growing up on Sunday afternoons we had to watch golf on TV if we were going to watch TV because Dad had control of the TV. I have listened to players like Nicholas, Palmer, Trevino, Player and now Tiger say the same kind of thing about hitting golf balls for hours and putting until the light was so dim you could not see the hole. The greats never get enough of just doing what they love to do.

They don't know how to quite because they love what they do. I just watched one night this last of the Iditarod dog sled race. It was won by a man who like Lance Armstrong had cancer. But he loved racing. The cold took some getting used to again. With the therapy he had and the limitations of his circulation his finger became numb almost immediately. While it was not life threatening, it was very painful, but he loved the dogs and he loved the race and he chose to race anyways.

What are you doing to be intentional about sharing the love of Jesus? Do you ever invite anyone to come to church with you? Is sharing God's love something you want or just something you think the church wants from you?

Jesus parting words to the disciples in the Gospel of Matthew are, "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father, the son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always even to the ends of the earth." It is never about what the church wants from you, or what some preacher thinks is necessary, or what feels right in our own minds. It is the command of Jesus that we share his love with others telling them about Jesus.

So if Jesus has asked of me to share God's love, what am I doing to get better each day? It was not the quickness of the rabbit in the race between the rabbit and the turtle that won the day; it was the steady, never ending one foot in front of the other attitude of the turtle that won the day. The turtle just kept doing. It was not fast it was not always wonderful or easy, but he just kept putting one foot in front of another. What might happen if we adopted the same kind of plan in sharing God's love with others? What if each day we just found one more person, however slow or difficult or strange it might feel, to just find one more person to talk to about Jesus?

Sometimes we fail to realize that all God is asking of us is to share, we are not responsible for the outcome or the results. Our task given by Jesus was simple to share. We are not being asked to hit golf balls as well as Tiger Woods or to enter the Iditarod in the cold north of Alaska or even to enter some contest for over achievers like the turtle did with the rabbit. We are asked to share the love God has given to us with another.

We cannot lose the love God has already given to us; it has already warmed and strengthened our hearts. We cannot make it increase in our lives by holding it more tightly, God's love for us is some much larger than our capacity to be loved. All that can happen is another one of the children of God who is yet to know of God's love may learn from us or they will chose to remain in darkness. Either way our relationship with God is only improved because we have been obedient in sharing to what was asked of us by Jesus. We will have shared God's love.