

Sermons at
First Lutheran Parish (ELCA)
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2 Samuel 06'01-05

I'm reminded of a scene from one of the great movies of all time – Footloose.

(Show video clip)

This is what King David is like. Once the Ark is back in David's city, David was so overjoyed that he danced in the streets in his underwear. (Yeah, that's basically what an ephod is.) When his wife, Michal, scolded him for his vulgarity, David proclaimed that he would do even CRAZIER things than that for the joy of the Lord.

And think about JESUS. Jesus was a joyful person. Look at the kinds of things they criticized him for. They said, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" It seems that Jesus loved a good party.

Maybe he was joyful because he was BORN at a party. Think about it. Any event that has a heavenly light show, people bearing gifts from distant places and a host of angels singing and giving directions is a party of major proportion.

And it must have made an impact on him. One of his favorite miracles was to turn water into wine, not vinegar. As his fame and popularity grew, he was constantly invited to dinners at Nicodemus's or Peter's or rich young people's houses. When crowds came, Jesus was adamant that no one leave with an empty stomach, and he always managed to locate food for them. He turned one boy's lunch into food for thousands. He told stories of a king who arranged a banquet and then got angry and disappointed when nobody came. He spoke of a father throwing a lavish party to celebrate a wayward son's return. When Jesus returned from the dead, he had a fish fry on the shore for his friends.

Jesus CAME from a very happy place, and he knew he was RETURNING to a very happy place. When he said, 'Whenever two or more are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them,' he saw a CELEBRATION coming on.

David and Jesus were OUT there, and they didn't CARE in the SLIGHTEST what ANYONE thought of them. We can LEARN something from them.

WE live in a world of social media, and on Facebook people ONLY share the very BEST pictures of themselves, and the most ATTENTION-GRABBING of events in their lives. Psychologists have found that people who are ON Facebook are actually more prone to DEPRESSION. Because no one's REAL life can measure up to their FRIEND'S trip to Disneyworld, and no one's REAL face in the MIRROR can compare to the PERFECT picture their friend took 15 TIMES to get JUST right. It's depressing. When we COMPARE ourselves to others, it's DEPRESSING. And what's SAD is that the OBJECT of our comparison isn't even REAL; it's FAKE.

It's a cliché that when people fill out their profile for online dating, no one puts in their REAL information. They want to look younger and thinner and taller and BETTER-EMPLOYED than they actually are. It's FAKE.

Of course, this began LONG before the internet. So many WOMEN compare themselves to the models in magazines. Do you realize that there are BILLIONS of women in the world who look NOTHING like supermodels, and 10 who do? Do you see a problem there? And those pictures in the magazines are air-brushed, to clear up any imperfections in their skin, and make them LOOK even THINNER than they already are. That means those SUPERMODELS don't even look like those pictures. Did you know that if Barbie were a REAL woman, she would have to walk on all fours? It's PHYSICALLY IMPOSSIBLE to be that thin. It's an IMPOSSIBLE image. It's FAKE.

Why do we DO this to ourselves? It even affects the way we PERCEIVE the world around us. I once did a funeral for a woman whose FAMILY didn't have much POSITIVE to SAY about her. She was always so NEGATIVE. NOTHING was EVER good enough for her. Even when her family took her to some place beautiful, like a national park, she said, "I thought it would be NICER than this." She was never able to ENJOY ANYTHING, because it didn't measure up to the STANDARD or the PICTURE she'd IMAGINED. And so she MISSED OUT on life, because she COMPARED it to something that wasn't REAL.

This is what we can learn from David and Jesus. We are called to live with integrity, to be real, genuine people. To be OURSELVES. To admit our faults and our failings and JUST BE.

When I meet with families for a baptism orientation before every baptism, we talk about parenting. One of the things I share with them is that our faith ALLOWS us to be REAL with our kids. We don't have to be PERFECT; we don't have to get everything right; we don't have to have all the answers. We can make MISTAKES, and when we DO, we can ADMIT it. You know, our children are SPONGES, and they're watching US to see how an adult behaves. So if they see in US someone who doesn't ADMIT when their wrong, doesn't take RESPONSIBILITY for their mistakes, and never APOLOGIZES, what kind of an adult will we raise? Not what we're hoping for.

Jesus calls us to be REAL, to be ourselves, FAULTS and all. You are VALUED by God, JUST the way you are. God knows EVERY hair on your head, and if you don't HAVE hair on your head, he knows every OTHER hair on your body too. He created it. You have more value than all the birds of the field. You are IMPORTANT to God.

But this is about MORE than just "living our best life now." How many people have been DAMAGED by religious PIETY? I heard of one pastor's mom that had grown up believing that drinking, playing cards, and dancing were the devil's work. When her son, now a pastor, came home from college and wanted to teach her how to play Wist, she said "no" for the longest time. Finally, she agreed ONLY as long as they could play in the BACK room, where there weren't any windows, so no one could SEE her playing cards. She said, "What will the neighbors think?"

Is that ALL there is to faith? This is why Christians have had the reputation as hypocrites, just trying to IMPRESS each other on Sunday. Piety isn't REAL, and people OUTSIDE the church can see RIGHT THROUGH it. Especially young people. Kids these days are exposed to so many advertisements, so many LIES, that they have ENORMOUS BS detectors, and they can TELL when someone is being fake.

I know, because that's how I felt about church when I was young. I thought it was BORING. It seemed like nobody CARED about what was happening. The pastors were going through the motions, and so were the PEOPLE.

So when I felt the call to become a pastor, I made a DEAL with God that, IF I was going to do this, I was going to do things DIFFERENTLY, but God had a SURPRISE for me. When I went to seminary I found that the people leading worship THERE MEANT the things they were saying, and SPOKE and SANG with a passion I had NEVER experienced before. And I realized that church had only been boring because the LEADERS were bored. You see, if I, as the LEADER, can't get excited about the Gospel, how can I expect anyone ELSE to?

And so, here I am, faults and all. I won't say ANYTHING I don't mean, and WHEN I mean it, I'll SHOW you that I mean. I'll give you EVERYTHING I have as your pastor, because this is the Gospel of our Lord, and if THAT doesn't call for some passion, WHAT DOES?

And this is what I love about you, the PEOPLE of FIRST Lutheran, and why I came here. You're REAL people. You LAUGH with each other. You are AUTHENTIC people, with REAL lives and REAL problems, and you're not PRETENDING to be something you're not. You're not ashamed of who you REALLY are, and you're not ashamed of the Gospel, or your church. You SHARE it with others. That's what the church is SUPPOSED to look like.

As David and Jesus SHOW us, God doesn't SETTLE for just getting PEOPLE in his church; God MAKES REAL people. Amen.