

Sermon- 2/11/18- Transfiguration Sunday and Annual Meeting

Cheers and Hard Hats

Today could be described as a “Big” Sunday in the life of Our Savior’s in beautiful downtown Neenah. In our Gospel lesson we have the familiar story of Jesus going up a mountain and some strange things occur, and later at 11:30 we have our Annual Meeting where hopefully no strange things will occur. (Commercial Message- very important that you attend).

First- the mountain top experience. The Sitz in Leban- the situation in time. The word about Jesus has been spreading. The local tabloids have been documenting all that has been happening. Jesus knew some things. He knew that he must travel to Jerusalem and die. But before he makes that journey he decides that he wants to spend some quality time with his closest disciples in some prayer and solitude. So, he takes three disciples with him up a mountain - Peter, James and John. When they arrived at that summit that day, something amazing happened rather immediately. A change came over Jesus; a change in appearance that made his clothes look so dazzlingly white that it hurt their eyes just to look at him. But that’s not all: two other men suddenly appeared next to Jesus. One of them was Moses, the one who delivered the Law to the people of God. The other was Elijah, the greatest of all prophets. Peter was awestruck, and said something foolish, as Peter was often wont to do. “Master, how great it is that we’re here! We can build three tents: one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah. And then we can stay on this mountain forever.” Peter was being an ELCA Lutheran- not really knowing what to say. Reminds me of a story.

Cathy and I were in the Big Apple. The occasion was the wedding of my brother, Stephen, to a local Menasha/ Neenah gal by the name of Kelli Moon. We were all staying at the Ritz Carleton overlooking Central Park. An extremely fancy joint, thus the name Ritz. Cathy was waiting for me in the lobby and I had returned to our room for some different walking shoes - she wanted to walk in Central Park. As I got in the elevator to return to the lobby, Christie Brinkley was there, probably coming down from the penthouse. You know she is the famous actress and model. Kind of funny, I just stood there - silence. I could have said something like- “how’s your day going” or something stupid like Peter said to Jesus, but no, I just stood there. When I arrived in the Lobby, Cathy says “are you okay?” I guess I

looked a little strange. I told her that Christie Brinkley was in the elevator with me. She asks “what did you say?” Of course I replied - “nothing.” I guess I just was being Lutheran.

When they were coming down the mountain Jesus does want them to share the story – how He died and rose for them. Not to build three churches on the mountain but to come down the mountain and work among the people and share the story.

That leads me to the other part of this “Big” day - our Annual Meeting. What are we here for? What’s our Purpose? Do we stay on the mountain where things are safe? Or do we come down the mountain and work with the people and share the story? Do we play it safe in the comfortable pews or do we get our hands dirty?

Another story! A few years ago, Cathy and I were in Boston in the Beacon Hill section right across from the Boston Public Garden. We were on a quest to locate the Bull and Finch Pub which was also named Cheers. This was the joint where the TV show Cheers was filmed. You know - where everybody knows our name, and everyone’s glad we came, and everyone’s problems are all the same. We found it and had a great lunch.

That image is nice for a church. There is a sense of community, a sense of belonging and caring and we value it deeply. For us it’s a welcome place. Does Our Savior’s have this picture? A resounding Yes.

But when we get back to the mountain top scene- the three tents- the three worship spaces - Jesus says “No” – we have to get off the mountain- there is work to do. All through the scriptures Jesus describes a church where people work. They work at feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and reaching out to the least of these our children. No! Jesus is saying that we need to pack a lunch pail, put on a hard hat and serve others.

Two churches. One is Cheers. To care and be cared for by the members of this congregation. The other to reach out to a world in need. So which one is it? Both - that’s what we will discuss at our Annual Meeting.

Every Sunday morning, we have people entering the doors of this church with those desperate needs on the front burners of their lives. And every Monday morning, we drive by countless homes and schools with people who weren't here on Sunday, but they have the very same needs. The discussion as to whether we should be a church of warm hearts or a church of calloused hands is a moot question. We must be both.

Later at our Annual Meeting we will discuss our church. But now is not the time to circle the wagons and celebrate our accomplishments. There are people within these walls whose needs are great. And there are people beyond our walls who are dying to find out if Christians really walk their talk.

You people of Our Savior's - those with warm hearts - those with calloused hands - as Jimmy V said- the most 7 important words for a Christian. "Don't Give Up, Don't Ever Give Up." Oh and don't be like me in the elevator. Say something. Tell them that Jesus loves them. Always!

Amen- Let it be so.