

A Sunday Devotional for God's People in Church and At Home

The First Church of Evans

Kanoeing for Kids Sunday, July 26, 2020

10am Service

Greetings from Jerusalem Corners,

This morning, we remember a man who was a member here for more than 58 years. Frank Vail Jr. spent his entire adult life challenging young men and women to learn the skills that would allow them to find and serve the Almighty out in God's big room, the great outdoors. At an age when most people want to rest, Frank's imagination was captured by a place, Camp Good Days and Special Times, that allowed critically ill children their season in God's big room. So began Kanoeing for Kids...

Call to Worship

1 John 3:16-18

Carl Mende

*By this we know love, that Christ laid down his life for us,
and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers and sisters.
But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need,
yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?
Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and truth.*

Hymn

"How Great Thou Art"

Choir Members

An Opening Prayer

Almighty Creator and Father,

You are the One who drew Abraham outside his tent and promised him children as many as the stars. So when we take you as our Father, we become children of Abraham as well. Please forgive us our sins and teach us to see in the children around us the sort of potential that could light up a night sky should they give their hearts to you and shine; through Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Devotional

Matthew 25:31-40

*"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.
Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate the people from one another
as a shepherd separates sheep and goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.
Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom
prepared for you from the foundation of the world.
For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink,
I was a stranger and you welcomed me.
I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'
And then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'When did we see you hungry and feed you,
or thirsty and give you drink?
And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to the least of my brothers, you did it to me.'*

Today, we gather in our sanctuary to remember a long standing tradition of kindness and sacrifice that first took to the water when Frank Vail Jr. led an expedition of men down the entire length of the Erie Canal to raise money for a camp that allowed tragically ill children their season in God's great outdoor sanctuary. It was an act of simple charity that Frank repeated year after year with several different crews of men, and then young men, and eventually young women, crews that seemed to get younger every year Frank launched.

While Kanoeing for Kids was motivated by the compassion and selflessness that lives in Christ's heart, it was not a specifically religious undertaking. People from church paddled side by side with people from our community and several others who were from all kinds of backgrounds and who expressed a variety of outlooks, some biblical and Christian and some not. Being the pastor who prayed them off the dock most of those years, I was occasionally reminded of the sacred lawyer from chapter 10 in Luke's gospel who, when Jesus told him to love his neighbor, turned back and asked Jesus, "*And who is my neighbor?*"

The reason he had to ask was that old Israel had always taken the term "*brother*" and "*neighbor*" in Moses' Law to refer to believers, fellow Israelites. So, hearing Jesus say that to "*inherit eternal life*" he would have to "*love... God... heart, ...soul, ...mind, ...and ...strength, ...and your neighbor as yourself,*" this lawyer wanted to find out just how far all this love would have to extend. "*And who is my neighbor?*" he asked. Like most of us, this man found it hard to manage to love another believer.

But then Jesus astounded him and everyone else by telling the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Samaritans in those days were a funny breed! They did worship Israel's God...at the wrong place, in the wrong way, and they were often ignorant enough that their theology and personal lives were unlikely to meet the approval of Israel's sacred lawyers. Yet Jesus tells the story of a Samaritan who showed up the very best Israel had to offer. Both a priest and a Levite flunked Jesus' good neighbor test, but a Samaritan in Jesus' story proved to be the brother and the neighbor that old Israel couldn't provide.

And there is a real danger here that we could misunderstand the parable and imagine that inheriting "*eternal life*" is simply about charity, that if we are sincere enough and kind enough and generous enough, we can earn a salvation that is built on something other than our faith and trust in what Jesus earned for us on the cross. The point of the Parable of the Good Samaritan is not that there is a quantity or an intensity of charity that can earn us eternal life. Jesus' point is that true faith, real brothers and real neighbors can arise from places we never imagined they could.

And Jesus always taught true believers can be counted on to love and help other believers, those neighbors and brothers whose trouble comes within our reach. Likewise, in the passage I just read from Matthew 25, Jesus is not teaching that there is a level of charity we can reach that will get us away from the goats and into the "sheep" category on Judgment Day. No amount of food or drink or clothing, no number of visits or acts of kindness will outweigh our sin come Judgment Day. The test Jesus poses in Matthew 25 is not about charity, it is about loyalty. If we believe, if we love and trust Jesus, we will also love and help those believers, those neighbors and brothers and sisters who need us.

It follows that the simple charity, the compassion Frank Vail showed to hurting children who may or may not have been his brothers or neighbors, is actually a cut higher than what Jesus is teaching in Matthew 25. Paul put it this way in Galatians, he wrote, "...as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." Frank Vail did both and that is why we remember him this Sunday every year.

Offering *Acts 20:35* "...remember the words of the Lord Jesus, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

The offering plate is placed on the way out of the sanctuary, or you can mail your offering from home to:

The First Church of Evans, Attn: Cindy Fanara, P.O. Box 364, Derby, NY, 14047.

Prayer *Matthew 7:7* "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you."

Please keep the governing authorities in prayer that they make wise decisions in response to the pandemic and to social unrest. Please keep our medical people and other first line public servants and their families in prayer as they selflessly face danger to save the lives of sick and vulnerable people. Please pray for our elderly loved ones who are at home or in care facilities, and remember those people who have lost loved ones, most recently the family of Lenora Brown. Please pray for Jean Hill and Richard Pearson who are still in the hospital and for Don Waddell's father, Ernie, who has been diagnosed with cancer. Please also remember Rob Buckler who is hospitalized in Boston with kidney trouble

Hymn

"Make Me a Blessing"

Choir Members

An Ancient Benediction

Numbers 6:24-26

*"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious unto you; the LORD lift his countenance upon you and give you his peace."*

Mid-Week Devotional

2 Corinthians 9:6-10

Jason Justinger, Deacon Chair

*The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will reap bountifully.
Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.
And God is able to make grace abound to you so that, having sufficiency in all things,
you may abound in every good work.
As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."
God, who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, will supply and multiply
your seed for sowing and he will increase the harvest of your righteousness.*

As a kid, I remember helping my dad work on things around the house, specifically refinishing the basement in my parents' house. Measuring the 2 by 4s, he'd cut them on my line for good or not, we'd fix the mistakes and I'd help nail them together. When that wall would finally go up, there was such a sense of... joy.

Today's message is not directly about those qualities, like joy, that Paul listed as the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians, chapter 5. Today's message is about stewardship. A steward is someone who is responsible for taking care of something that belongs to someone else. We've talked about this before. Stewardship is not just about money. It is as much about time and talents as it is about money and things. God gives us all of these things. I can't, however, speak about stewardship without talking about joy.

The Apostle Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 9:7, "*So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or out of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.*" According to John MacArthur, the phrase "*as he purposes*" means "Intentional, Premeditated. A predetermined plan of action that is done from the heart voluntarily, but not impulsively." Everything we have, God provides to us, and asks us to tend them for His Glory. So we are supposed to take some time to think about our giving, to plan as any good steward would. We are supposed to prayerfully and purposefully decide what to do with the things God gives us.

Matthew Henry, a Puritan pastor from the late 1600's, wrote this about giving: "Money bestowed in charity may... seem thrown away, but when given from proper principles, it is seed sown, from which a valuable increase may be expected. It should be given carefully. Works of charity, like other works, should be done with thought and design. Due thought as to our circumstances, and those we are about to relieve, will direct our gifts for charitable uses. Help should be given freely, be it more or less; not grudgingly, but cheerfully."

Dad didn't need my help to build a basement. He could have done a better job, faster, more efficiently. He asked me to help, and let me make mistakes for my benefit. God doesn't need the stuff or the money he provides us to steward over. He gives us these things so that we can reap the joy that is giving. That we can bear fruit like joy... the joy of a child is waiting to be harvested by each of us. Oh and there is such an abundant crop! Time, Money, Talents, Things... it doesn't matter. All we have to do is give. Joy for us. Glory for God. It may just be the best win ever.

A Personal Remembrance of Frank Vail Jr.

Pastor Stephen Ridge

The legacy of Kanoeing for Kids speaks for itself, and many of you were more involved and more committed to it than I was. But I did want to take a moment just to note the influence that I think Frank had on my oldest son, Francis. The first year that Frank and his original crew of friends and neighbors and mountain men paddled from Tonawanda all the way to the Hudson River, I met them on the Canal and paddled with them for a day, me and Francis in the front of Frank Vail's big canoe when Francis was around eight.

I brought him out there because I knew he would see things and learn things that a city guy like me could never teach him. It was a long, dreary day, but a real adventure for a boy Francis' age and he continued to want adventures like that in the years that followed. He got involved in Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts and Venture Crew and, though he was a quiet, shy, bookish young man, he could be counted on to step forward for things that involved fending for himself in the woods and on the water. He was one of the few who stayed in his lean-to overnight through a thunderstorm to earn his survival merit badge. He spent a whole weekend in the woods with another scout to earn his Order of the Arrow sash.

But the trip I was proudest of was when he and two other scouts spent a week on the Allegheny River with Frank Vail and Drew Lloyd down past the Kinzu dam. I believe that much of what has followed for Francis became possible for him because he watched men like Frank and John Freidhoff paddle away from everything easy out into the wilds to pitch their own tents and make their own food. I think the confidence he learned from men like Frank Vail out in God's big room got Francis ready for the Army and all the responsibilities that have come his way since. And it makes me glad that my children grew up here.