

Message #1028
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"FORGIVING ERNEST LITWEILER"
{Matthew 6:6-15}

Trinity Presbyterian Church
October 5, 2003

INTRODUCTION

EIGHTH GRADE BIOLOGY CLASS

Teacher: Ernest Litweiler--stern disciplinarian

Major Exam

Instructions given

No talking, cheating = automatic "F"

I was doing very well on test when...

Martha Boggs' pencil broke

She sat right behind me

Poked me asking for a pencil

I reached into my pencil holder...turned around...gave her a pencil BIG MISTAKE!!!!

Mr. Litweiler's Revenge

When I straightened up in my seat prepared to complete the test...there stood Mr. Litweiler before me--arms folded--with fire in his eyes.

He made some comment about making an example of those who cheated in his class

While I protested and tried to explain my gesture of kindness, he proceeded to yank me from my seat by my ear and pulled me through the room and threw me out into the hall for the remainder of the class

At the ringing of the final bell, Mr. Litweiler instructed the class to remain in their seats...he brought me back into the room...went to my desk...brought my test to the front...wrote a big "F" on the top...and said, Class Dismissed!"

...I pleaded with him to let me explain

...He responded: "Class Dismissed!"

...and my GPA dropped considerably because I gave Martha a pencil

35 YEARS LATER...

I was soon to preach a message series the weeks following Easter entitled: "The Road to Pentecost."

...I had received a flyer from Our Lady of Guadeloupe Benedictine Monastery in Pecos, New Mexico advertising a seminar: "Discovering the Holy Spirit"

...sounded intriguing

...requested information

...received post card with simple message: "We would be delighted to have you join us...David"

...curiosity got the best of me

...I registered

...and our youth director at the time, Fritz Moga, decided to join me

It was just after dark on a that very cold February evening when we arrived...snow was on the ground...ice cycles hung from the roof...we walked gingerly toward the door because of ice patches on the cement...and everything seemed so very dark.

...Neither Fritz nor I had ever been to a monastery before

...we didn't know what to expect

...we conjured up in our minds monks with shaved heads walking about chanting...wearing brown habits and sandals...sleeping on hard beds...eating a sparse diet of fruit and nuts ...sleeping on hard cots in cold rooms
...I told Fritz: "If worse comes to worse, we'll return to Santa Fe and rent a motel!"
A young monk greeted us at the door...wearing blue jeans, flannel shirt, and a cross made from beads {which he said was his habit}.
...he gave us a brief orientation
...startled us: this was a charismatic monastery
...it was the only coed monastery in the U.S. at the time
...took us to our ultramodern rooms with all the modern conveniences

OPENING SESSION

Sang songs of praise with guitar accompaniment
...hands of many were raised high
...some sang the familiar songs with eyes closed in worship
...much time spent in prayer
...some prayed quietly in tongues
Whenever we sang Fritz would raise his hands high and nudge me and say,
"Raise your hands!"
...I refused
...I was a Presbyterian
...I wasn't sure I was in agreement with all of this
...besides Presbyterians don't raise their hands!
...Fritz really got into the spirit of the meeting
...like many a Presbyterian...I sat back and observed

DAY TWO

The next day we attended a seminar on the Holy Spirit
...speaker was mediocre {not too profound}--not too sure he was familiar with his subject
...at every meal I was a celebrity--never had a Presbyterian clergy person attended this monastery
...they would wait to see where I was sitting and they'd hurry and fill the table to join me
That evening I met ELSIE HERNANDEZ from San Jose, New Mexico. We had quite a conversation...
..."Do you speak in tongues?"
..."Nope, I have enough problem keeping the tongue I have under control...I don't need any more!"
..."God wants you to speak in tongues...tonight!"
..."I don't think so; but, I'm grateful for your concern."
..."I'm going to pray for you!"
..."Thank you, I need prayer"
..."Come, I'm going to pray for you now!"
..."Where?"
..."Just follow me...!"

I followed her with her husband and Fritz and went into a little anteroom beside the chapel.
..."Now, we're going to pray and you will pray in tongues!"
..."I don't know how! I don't have that gift!"
..."Just do what I tell you!"
..."I really don't want to!"

...“You are going to pray in tongues tonight...God told me!”
...“Why didn’t He tell me?”
...“Pray what I tell you, ok?”
...“OK!”
...“Lord Jesus...I know I’m a sinner...I want You to come into my heart...forgive me of my sins...and I want You to become my Savior and Lord!”
...I had no problems with that, though I prayed that when I was seven years old
...“Lord Jesus, I want to speak in tongues...and receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost!”

I stopped Elsie and told her that I appreciated her enthusiasm but that I just could/would not pray that prayer and explained that I didn’t feel that was my spiritual gift.

...“Just pray it!”

...“I can’t honestly!”

Then I told her, let me conclude the prayer my way. So I prayed:

“Lord, please fill me with Your Spirit and give me whatever gifts you desire that I can use for Your glory!”

...she was satisfied and assured me I would speak in tongues that night

...I didn’t, but something even more amazing happened to me.

SERVICE OF RECONCILIATION AND RESTORATION

That evening in the chapel one of the sisters led us in a Service of Reconciliation and Restoration.

...the room was dark

...the only light was a bright spotlight that illumined a large floor to ceiling crucifix

...never have I been more moved by the the Christ suspended upon the cross as I was that night

She took us through our life cycle...each time she concluded and paused with the words: “Thank God for... and/or...can you forgive?”

...conception

...gestation

...birth

...a mother’s love

...parent’s love

...teacher’s love

Teacher’s love? Just then then I could feel the pain and humiliation of 35 years earlier...I seethed in anger and hatred towards Ernest Litweiler.

Just then, she directed our attention to the crucifix...

...Hear His words: “Father, forgive...!”

...Hear Him: “Father, forgive them...!”

...Now hear Him: “Father, forgive these...!”

She asked, “Who came to the cross and said, ‘Jesus, I’m so sorry?’ Name one! No one came; but, He cried out, ‘Father forgive them...!’”

So, “if Jesus forgives you...me...those who have wronged you...can you forgive them, too?”

I got up...ran to my room...and literally fell to my knees and began to weep and pray. As I prayed I thought of the prayer we pray nearly every time we gather:

“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors...!”

...suddenly I thought, what if God took me at my word?

...“Forgive me...as I forgive....!”

Then I read: "If you forgive others when they in against you, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But, if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins!" {Matthew 6: 14-15}

...I took out my journal

...I began to pray for people who had hurt me

...those who had said unkind things about me

...spread untruthful rumors to others

...gossiped behind my back

...name after name surfaced {you've been there...you know of what I speak...and SOME OF YOU ARE THERE RIGHT NOW!}

...some were easy to forgive

...others, I'd argue with God..."Not them, Lord!"

..."Not him...not her...!"

...and I'd hear the words: "Forgive as I have forgiven you!"

In the midst of this cathartic experience I had this horrific vision of being escorted out of the room by Ernest Litweiler.

..."No, Lord...I cannot forgive him

...he humiliated me

...he made a horrible example of me"

...I could see him scribbling that huge "F" on my exam

...the pain/embarrassment resurfaced

...I heard the words: "Class Dismissed!"

...I was filled with rage again...35 years had not eased my pain!

..."Where was he?

...Why didn't he come to me and say, 'I'm sorry, Jack? I was wrong!'"

...and I heard, "Who came to Me when I was dying for you?"

...let go!

...let me take care of it!

...let go!

...let go!

...let go!

And...finally....I let go...I said, "Lord, I forgive Ernest Litweiler!"

...I was exhausted

...I had wrestled with the Lord

...but after 35 years...I found peace

...the weight was lifted

CONCLUSION

In a few moments we're going to partake of the Sacrament of Holy Communion together.

...do you have an Ernest Litweiler in your life?

...someone you need to forgive?

Before we partake we will pray: "Forgive us...as we forgive!"

...let's not pray that unless we mean it

...what if God took us at our word?

We read in I Corinthians 11...

"Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves before you eat of the bread and drink from the cup..."

Let's make this a love feast this morning...

...let's show our love for the Lord

...let's demonstrate our love for one another
If you are holding a grudge towards anyone in this room...
...anyone in your life
...release it now
...ask for forgiveness
...and forgive those who have sinned against you.

If you need to make something right with someone...do it during the singing of the hymn...and then come to the table of the Lord together.

Prayer: "Touch us Lord! Heal us Lord! Forgive us Lord! Take from us our selfish pride! Remove my arrogant spirit! Forgive me...and help me God to forgive...as You've forgiven me. Make me an channel of Your peace....in the name of the Christ who forgives all...Amen!"