

"Keeping the Faith"

January 13, 2007

Christ UMC

Good morning!

My name is Don Meckley

I am a visitor here today.

Any other visitor's here today?

I am a member of MUMC

Certified Lay speaker in UMC so I am actually doing this with the blessing of the UMC

I am active in the WV Emmaus community

I am married to Robin for 34 years

2 sons: 4 Gs category:

Grown

Gone from the house

Gainfully employed

God, thank you!

I'm here today for two reasons:

Pastor John isn't

God sometimes works in strange and mysterious ways

I am grateful & feel blessed for the opportunity to deliver God's message to you this morning...and hope when it's all said and done you feel the same.

Keeping the Faith

Job 1: 1-3; 1:13-19 (453)

Ephesians 2: 4-10 (192)

In 1991 a fairly obscure movie titled "Talent for the Game" was released starring:

Edward James Olmos

Jeff Corbett

"Talent for the Game" is a story about Virgil Sweet, a major league baseball scout for the CA Angels who loves, and lives for, the game of baseball.

But this particular spring his career is threatened when the team's new owner decides to eliminate the scouting program...and Virgil along with it.

Virgil's only hope of "career survival" is to find one gifted prospect to save the struggling Angels franchise...

To find the one *phenomenal* prospect the scouts call simply the "PHENOM"

The PHENOM is described as the player that just rises perfect out of the earth.

The PHENOM doesn't have to learn like you and me, he's born to play baseball.

All scouts believe the PHENOM exists...the hard part is finding him...and for Virgil Sweet, the challenge is to find him real soon.

As Virgil is trekking along the back roads en route to Pocatello, ID in desperate search of the PHENOM, his car breaks down..

The water pump "happens" to fail across the road from where 20 year old Sammy Bodine is pitching the last inning of a ball game.

Virgil watches Sammy strike out the last two batters with Nolan Ryan kind of heat. Pin point accuracy.

Virgil talks to Sammy

Virgil gives him an "on the spot" tryout.

Virgil is impressed.

Sammy is the best he's ever seen.

Sammy is the PHENOM Virgil's been praying for.

Sammy's dad happens to own the local grocery store, gas station and auto repair shop where Virgil has his water pump replaced.

Sammy's dad is also the pastor of the Genesee Community Church... like his daddy before him and his daddy before HIM...and it is made VERY clear to Virgil that Sammy is destined to follow his dad into the pulpit.

Virgil knows Sammy is his ticket to job security and he's not giving up without a fight.

He talks to Sammy's dad about sin.

Sin is said to be missing the mark.

Missing the mark is when you possess a God given talent or gift and do not use it.

Possessing a talent for the game of baseball, like God gave Sammy, and not using it, would be a sin.

Virgil's talk about sin didn't sit well with Sammy's dad...but it struck a cord with his mom.

It's Sammy's mom who that ultimately convinces dad to allow Sammy to travel to LA with Virgil to use *his talent for the game* in a shot at the big leagues.

Took a lot of faith for this small town mom to put the well being & future of her only son in the hands of a person she'd known for < 24 hours.

I'd like to show you a scene from that movie where we find Virgil & Sammy en route to CA.

SHOW THE SCENE 037:16 TO 039:13

Sin is putting that classic mustang in harm's way

“Put this target...right in your mind's eye”

“Focus this target in your mind's eye and let your physical being take over”

Faith is Sammy closing his eyes and trusting that Virgil knows what he is talking about.

Faith is Virgil trusting that Sammy will not throw a second pitch thru the window of his Mustang.

Sometimes our faith is tested.

Sometime our faith is shattered.

Job was a man of strong faith.

He was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

Job was blessed beyond measure.

He was blessed with 7 sons & 3 daughters

Thousands & thousands of sheep. Camel, oxen, donkeys.

Many, many servants.

Job was the greatest of all people of the east.

He was on top of the world in his business and his personal life.

Then in a swift series of events, it's ALL GONE.

Everything...

livestock

servants

his 10 children

All are taken away...swiftly and mercilessly.

How did Job handle this?

Job 1:20 "He tore his robe in mourning, shaved his head, fell on the ground & worshipped...

And said....

"The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

How does one suffer all this and remain faithful?

Job's heart was broken, his pockets are empty, but his faith steadfast.

Just when you'd think it couldn't get any worse, sores break out on his body, loathsome sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head.

At this point, I'd imagine Job to be at a turning point in his faith when his wife says, "Do you still persist in your integrity? (faith in God) Curse God and die."

In 2:10 – But he said to her, "you speak as any foolish women would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?"

In ALL this, Job did not sin with his lips/curse.

How would your faith hold up in all hardship & spousal pressure?

If I ever spoke to my wife like that, faith would not be my most immediate problem I assure you!

But wait, the story is not over.

3 of Job's friend come to "support" Job.

One says Job must have sinned and God is merely disciplining you as a parent discipline a wayward child.

The 2nd reminds Job that God is just and righteous & tells Job that sin causes suffering; If God is just & righteous, then someone is to blame for all Job is suffering. (either Job or his family)

3rd friend is patient and listens to Job but then blasts Job saying that God's superior wisdom discerns sin that Job cannot see & encourages Job to "the will of God focused, right in your mind's eye".

All that he lost... possessions, servants, family.

Those closest to him that remain, his wife & friends, offer no support...at a time he could really use a friend!

Regardless, Job doesn't take this lying down because he complains long and loud and directly to God.

Challenges God, demands that God tell him what he did wrong.
Why me, Lord. Why me?

God does answer Job directly. (That's a pretty big deal all by itself)

God commends Job for his persistence, his integrity, his unwillingness to confess sins he hadn't committed, and his refusal to curse God or deny God's reality in all this.

That is where the rubber hits the road, faith wise...to suffer the losses as Job did and then have the "big guy" commend you for it.

Why did God allow all this to happen to Job?
A man of such great moral fiber and of strong faith?
Why would a loving and merciful God allow this to happen to anyone, but why a man as faithful as Job?

That's a good question to ask Pastor John.
(I haven't a clue)

There is a happy ending to the story of Job.

God blesses Job with 7 more sons & 3 more daughters and twice as many animals as before and a long life.

Job sees 4 generations of offspring....

Not all stories have a happy *earthly* ending....for by grace you have been saved thru faith, & this is not your own doing; it is a gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

Sometimes the reward for our faithfulness comes later...but lasts for eternity!

In times of trial & hardship, our faith is what helps us focus on our ultimate destination rather than our immediate pain & suffering.

With Christmas just a few weeks ago, I'm sure the story of Mary & Joseph is still fresh in you minds.

Let's look at Mary & Joseph from a "keeping the faith" standpoint.

Mary & Joseph are engaged & have been behaving themselves.

Mary becomes pregnant.

They both know they hadn't been "together" so this is tough enough for them to understand.

What about their parents? Friends? Priest?

I'd imagine Joseph is hurt and humiliated beyond words.

It's during the darkest, most trying times of life that a person's true character is revealed.

Not sure how it could have been ANY darker for Joseph at that time in his life.

He had the right to divorce Mary.

If he pressed formal charges, Mary could be stoned for her "betrayal".

But Joseph was a righteous man.

He had God's "will" *right in his mind's eye*.

He did not want to embarrass Mary any further than she already was.

He wanted to: dismiss her quietly" and move on with his life.
And who could have blamed him?

But he didn't.

His faith in Mary and his faith in God sustained him.

Mary & Joseph's love & faith in God allowed the love and faith they shared to grow and draw them closer to each other during this difficult time.

And their faith drew them even closer to God during the months and trials ahead.

They had the journey to Bethlehem.

Praise God for the birth of his son, Jesus Christ!

Wise men come...and the wise men go...

Then "fleeing to Egypt"

Leaving Egypt and going to Nazareth

It only takes a moment to make these points, but these "events if you will" were not little day trips.

It's 90 miles to Bethlehem with a pregnant woman on a donkey

Bethlehem to Egypt was couple hundred miles thru the desert on a donkey

Egypt back to Nazareth was ~ 300 miles back thru the desert and rocky mountain paths all on foot/donkey.

Time and time and time again, Joseph faithfully answered God's call regardless of the inconvenience and the humiliation and the sacrifice.

How much faith and love for God must Joseph have had to trust God to do ALL these things?

How strong a faith must we have to follow where God nudges us?

Because God so loved the world, 2,000 years ago, He humbled himself and sent his only son Jesus Christ, to be born in that lowly manger

He entrusted the early care of His only son to two very special people, Mary & Joseph

Because they were righteous people

Because they trusted God, no matter what he asked them to do

Regardless of the embarrassment

Regardless of the personal sacrifice

Regardless of the inconvenience

Mary & Joseph had very little to offer in the way of material goods.

Their gifts to God were their character and their faith.

At the end of the movie Talent for the Game, Sammy Bodine is pitching his first game for the CA Angels.

In the 1st inning, Sammy gets “shelled” and gives up 4 runs.
His faith in Virgil is shaken.

In the second inning, Sammy is reminded by Virgil, in a very unique way, to “Put the target right in your minds eye” but to NEVER close his eyes again when he’s pitching.

When Sammy faithfully heeds that advice, he strikes out the side.

We need to keep God’s word and God’s will “*right in our mind’s eye*”

It’s pretty easy to do that inside the walls of Christ UMC, among friends.

Do we have the Job, the Joseph & Mary kind of faith to persevere once we leave this place?

Is our faith rock solid enough to sustain us out there in the real world when we encounter:

a hateful boss

the betrayal of a friend

the loss of a loved one

a serious illness

loss of a job

You know these things are out there.
For some of us, they're already with us.

Let us keep the will of God focused, *right in our mind's eye* and allow the love of Christ,
and our faith, grow deep into our hearts

May we never close our eyes, or our hearts, to God again!

Amen