

Sermons at Saint Mark's

The Right Rev. Greg Rickel, Bishop of Olympia
The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, Oct. 10, 2010
2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Luke 17:11-19

Where your treasure is

His name is David Anthony Wilkey, Jr. He was 22 years old. He was from Eklhart, Indiana. His wife is named Melinda, and he had two sons, Christian and Blayke, and Melinda was 8 months pregnant with his third child when he was killed by a makeshift bomb in Baghdad. Reports are unclear, his death reported to be either June 18th, or June 19th, 2007. He was in the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, Fort Riley, Kan. I never knew him. But, I carry now, this band, on my arm, with his name and date of his death. I got it here, at Saint Mark's Cathedral, last Christmas Eve.

This is how it went down; I was standing outside, outside those big doors, after the 11:00 pm service, greeting people and wishing them a Merry Christmas. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a man standing near me, and he remained there for quite some time, until almost all were gone, and then I turned to him and asked him if he needed anything. He came up to me, with this band, and he said to me. "This was my brother in arms. He saved my life. I have carried this since, but I can't carry it any longer. He just stared at me, and then he said, I have to let this go. I need to let this go. I can't carry it any more. And so, almost as a reflex, I reached out for this band, and said, let me do it. I will carry it. He thanked me, hugged me, and left. I put it on my arm, and it has been there ever since. I have actually been surprised at how few people have asked me about it over these past months. It is amazing

what you can find on the internet, through that I have kept up with them some; the baby in her womb was born shortly after his death. Life went on.

I did blog about it just shortly after I received it. And I have had several respond that once I am done wearing it, and I have vowed to do so until Christmas Eve this year, in this place, that they would take it and wear it. So, on Christmas Eve I will do that, give it to the next person. Some day, I am going to contact his wife, and perhaps get this to her if she so wishes.

I did not know him, but I will tell you that in my prayers I remember him, and I pray for his family daily.

You may wonder why I decided to tell you this now, if at all. This is the beginning of Stewardship Season after all, the October Bega-thon as I have called it in a more derogatory way. That is why we set it up that I would be here on this particular Sunday. Even more, if you are not aware of it yet, the date today is 10/10/10. On a day when I might be called to talk about the tithe, 10%, the gift of this day being 10/10/10, and even more the realization when Becky and I set this date, that we had no idea, well that is a tremendous gift. I could make something of that. You may also know that because this is 10/10/10, there is an international day today called the Global Day of Doing, centered around the environment, God's creation. I will come back to that.

For this day, there is the reading from the Second Book of Kings that you have, but there is also an option of Jeremiah, 29: 1, 4-7.

Among the verses we hear these prescriptions from the prophet.

29:5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce.

29:7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

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Even as we speak, Tent City resides in this place, on this property, right outside those walls. We know from the reactions this gets in other locations, not everyone is fond of it. But here it is.

In the Gospel today, it should not be missed, on this day of 10/10/10, that Jesus, after healing the 10, has only one turn and praise God. The writer even has Jesus ask, "Were not 10 made clean?" Where are the other nine?" This one, the 10%, that turned and praised God, that looked to something greater than their good fortune, that took the time to recognize the power which he had just been subject to. It is a 10/10/10 kind of day, maybe even a life.

I want to tell you today why I give my money, and my time to this endeavor, we call Church. We can get lost in all the things it does not do well. It is a human organization so it is going to fail from time to time. As a priest reminded me this past week,

"The Church is a sacrament with institutions and not an institution with sacraments." We would do well to remember that. Yes, we get the institutions wrong sometimes, we make mistakes, but the sacrament is from God, and is

God's, a gift to us, and that remains, regardless of what we do to it from time to time.

The vision is still a good one. The kingdom Jesus put life to, and gave his life for, that is always valid, whether we get it or not. For me, this place is still a place where we are trying, this institution is still attempting to carry that sacrament, to gather around it, and to give it ears, and eyes, and feet, and hands.

You don't have to guess about what I give. I publish it every year, what we make as a family, what we give away. We believe in the tithe, not because our salvation or anyone else's is wrapped up in that, if you hear that it is, run from that! It is not, God will not love you one bit more if you give to the Church, or don't. That is the amazing thing about our God, but you might love yourself more. You may find your heart more engaged with the dream that is the Kingdom of God. Jesus knew this very well, that is why he talked about wealth, money, and possessions more than just about any other topic. He knew we were built to give, to need to do it.

He really did not talk about sex, yet we seem to not want to stop talking about it, arguing about it, setting our whole life about it, even splitting the church over it. What we pay far less attention to, I would even say no attention, purely avoid, is money.

I believe it is a spiritual issue, it cannot be otherwise, nothing, in our lives as Christians can be so pervasive, nothing we are so marinated in, in this society, nothing like that can we avoid or pretend is not a spiritual issue for us. It is. So, my family and I have chosen to sanctify that part of our lives, take the power out of it by talking about it openly, giving at least 10% of it to the church, and even more away. It is just a good practice. If you know me, you know I need discipline, otherwise I wander. This gives me that.

Yes, we need to pay bills, and staff, and perhaps even bishops, but more than that, I think about those out there at Tent City, the throngs that come to Compline, those you all feed every week from this kitchen, and lest we forget, the mass of people that come through those doors, not only regulars like you and me, but all, and go out and do miraculous things that we never hear about because of the way they were fed here, our focus on our creation, which is most certainly part of our stewardship, ...and I think about that Christmas Eve night, and all that had to come together, how all the preparation for that one moment, and how many people who are alive now, and those who have gone before us who made sure we could be here right now, how they were a part of that moment, when that man laid down a burden he had to lay down, in a place he felt safe enough to do it, and I, and therefore, we, took it, and raised the level of our consciousness, awakening for us an expanded life that is not always comfortable or easy.

These are moments of witness. These are moments of transformation, moments I need in my life, and moments that make me believe we can still get every closer to that Kingdom Jesus told us of.

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