

In the Name of God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Sunday, January 30, 2011 - *The Fourth Sunday after The Epiphany*

Micah 6:1-8; Psalm 15; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Matthew 5:1-12

146th Annual Meeting – Preached at Grace Church, Elmira

What happened?! Is there any identification on him at all? Was anyone with him who can identify him? Was he walking or riding a bicycle? How old is he? 15? 16? Is there no one with whom we can discuss this matter at all? These were the words flying around the emergency room Thursday evening at the Arnot Ogden Medical Center as they rushed to treat the broken body of a young boy brought in to the center by paramedics and the police after he had been hit by a car on the city's Southside. As the medical staff sought to apply the very best of their skills to a fading life situation, it was not so much the thought of the loss of life that was so disturbing it was the simple fact that they were dealing with a person who was "unnamed," and therefore "unknown."

For each and every person who came and went from the trauma room, it was not so much the medical situation that was so unsettling it was the fact that this was someone who was loved and known, but not yet missed at that moment not quite yet. How soon would it be before someone would wonder why this young boy had not bounded through the door looking for some supper wanting to tell about the afternoon basketball game at the Y or simply looking for a hug after a long day?



And as life slowly slipped from this young boy and from the control of the medical staff, it would still be some time before he would have a name an identity by which everyone there could speak to him, comfort him, hold and caress him in those final moments of his time in this world before he slipped through that very thin veil that separates the reality of this world and that of the dimension that we call heaven.

Yes, that quickly. That suddenly. That simply Life changes in the moment of a breath. It is in these very sobering moments that we are reminded very quickly, if not suddenly, of that which is truly important to us and to our life These are those moments when the Prophet Micah would thrust upon us in all of his great wisdom that eternal question: “[God] has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (6:8).

Yet it is our greatest human fear, is it not? Not that we shall die, no that is a given. Is not our greatest human fear that we shall be forgotten? That all that we are and all that we stand for shall vanish? Mitch Albom mesmerized readers around the world with his number one New York Times bestsellers, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* and *Tuesdays with Morrie*. Yet I

think his best work is a beautiful, haunting little tale about the family we love and the chances we miss in a book entitled, *For One More Day*. It is the story of a mother and a son, and a relationship that covers a lifetime and beyond. It explores the question: What would you do if you could spend one more day with a lost loved one?

In short, as a child, Charley “Chick” Benetto was told by his father, “*You can be a mama’s boy or a daddy’s boy, but you can’t be both.*” So he chooses his father, only to see the man disappear when Charley is on the verge of adolescence. Decades later, Charley is a broken man. His life has been crumbled by alcohol and regret. He loses his job. He leaves his family. He hits bottom after discovering his only daughter has shut him out of her wedding. And he decides to take his own life. He makes a midnight ride to his small hometown, with plans to do himself in. But upon failing even to do that, he staggers back to his old house, only to make an astonishing discovery. His mother – who died eight years earlier – is still living there, and welcomes him home as if nothing ever happened. He gets the chance to change his story and he takes it – and, in the process, he finds that he will not be forgotten



Why will he not be forgotten? Because Charley finds the strength to recenter his life in things “*wiser than human wisdom*” and “*stronger than human strength*” as Blessed Paul puts it this morning in our Epistle (1:25). This is the power of the Cross! This is the power of Christ’s reconciling love and redemption for each and every one of us – which we are meant to share and spread day-by-day with the world around us. This is the power of our faith . . . a faith which, yes, may seem foolish to the world for we are a people who know that the Holy One who has made us, sustained us and loves us will never forget us, even when we pass through the bounds of this temporal life. As St. Paul again challenges each of us today, “*Consider your own call, brothers and sisters,*” and that, indeed, is what we gather today to do as we reclaim and refocus our mission as the people who are Grace Church.

Since 1998 we have centered ourselves around three important tenets of mission and ministry: worship, outreach, and pastoral care. And although the world around us has dramatically and, to some degree, drastically changed in its social and economic forces that have been brought to bear upon us, these three components have continued to stand true for our parish community. As a parish with a rich, English-Catholic background and heritage, worship remains our largest and finest drawing card as a Christian entity in this area. It is also our most challenging area to maintain with all of our resources – and we are not alone in trying to do so.

Some might argue that it is the fear of losing this tradition that is currently at stake within the life of our parish and, to some degree, I believe there is some truth to that. None of us wishes to see Grace Church cease to exist, yet more importantly, none of us wishes to see the beauty of

this tradition of worship and music cease to exist from our world. However I would suggest that this fear has been pushed even further today to something far darker, uglier and insidiously malignant and that is the intentional work of a few people to create division, anger and chaos within our parish community and this, my friends, needs to stop. If ever there was a reason for God to wipe the memory of Grace Church from the earth, it would be for this uncharitable behavior that is untrue to the Gospel and the very Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. On behalf of the Vestry and any number of beleaguered parishioners who are tired of unsolicited phone calls and mailings, I respectfully ask that these things please stop. All of us need to enter into a time of peace and reconciliation at this very Altar. All of us need to remember that our calling in the very image of this Rood Beam is to pursue our callings as brothers and sisters, as well as our vocations as children of God, seeking to live in joy, peace and harmony together as a community in Christ's Name to the best of our ability. As your parish priest and on behalf of our Diocesan Bishop, I ask each of you to daily seek to live out our calling to be the compassionate presence of Jesus Christ to each other and the world.

The challenges that lie before us are not simple, nor easy. They call for demanding, thoughtful, complicated thinking that is filled with prayer, reflection and consultation with our Bishop and diocesan partners. There are no "simple fixes" here. The Vestry, in consultation with Bishop Adams, is committed to a future that is forward-thinking, positive in spirit and language, and to the very best of our ability, loving and compassionate. But that does not mean that in walking the high road that the parish leadership will be lined up as a sort of "shooting gallery." Everyone – each and every one of us – will be held accountable to our Baptismal Covenant and those who choose to speak and/or act otherwise will be asked to be publically reconciled to this Altar.

The entirety of today's Gospel revolves around one word – one word. What is it? **Blessed.** Yes, Blessed. Our Lord speaks here only of blessedness for those of us who love Him and follow Him. In doing so and as we listen you can hear in His words a certain edge of "almost there, but not quite there yet" feeling – you know, sort of like when you are on vacation with the kids and there's still an hour to go and they wanted to be there a half hour ago! These are blessings that we experience in part but yet not completely – not yet – because we just aren't there yet in this life. Life is a hard, hard journey. Blessedness is our vocation for and with God, day-by-day. Blessedness is about dwelling in the light and truth of God. It is about speaking truth. Speaking truth and telling truth is hard work and lonely work as well, but it needs to be done AND it needs to be done faithfully and prayerfully.

Rejoice and be glad, my friends, for the Kingdom of God is here! We simply need to claim the blessing and share it, for the Lord never forgets His faithful children.

