

SERMON FOR SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2009
ST. PAUL'S CHURCH – MICHIGAN

This past week I read an interesting article about clergy that mentioned something about clergy that I admit that I had never seen articulated in the way that it was mentioned. It stated something of what is a 90, 90, 90 rule. What that 90, 90, 90 rule meant is that 90% of the work that clergy do is not seen by 90% of the people, 90% of the time. For a few moments I thought about that comment and then I believe that it is probably true and I thought of some things that I have done which for one reason or another, are not spoken of. The next day I thought of something similar in a way but yet different. A few years ago I asked you to play along one evening in an exercise that we had after a dinner and it was in the guildhall. The exercise actually consisted of two parts. The first part was where each person was given a penny and on the back of the penny was a year when it was minted. Each person had to tell the group something significant that happened in that year for them....and we heard some wonderful stories. The second part of the exercise was where each person had to tell the group something that happened in their life or some aspect of their life that was important to them and yet they thought that no one or few in the group and in church would know about it. Once again we heard some incredible and touching stories. I mention those two things....the 90, 90, 90 rule and the story of an exercise that we played one evening in the guildhall because there is so much that we do not about each other. As much as we think we know one another....still there is always something more. And as much as we think that we know about a person's faith and journey of faith...there is always a part of their journey and faith that is maybe kept quiet and seldom spoke of, if ever. As much as we speak about God and might be seen entering a church on Sunday morning and doing the things that are associated being Christians and followers of Jesus, so there are

sometimes when more goes on for God than others see and know. In the Gospel for this Sunday Jesus had some harsh words once again. He said watch out for those who do things just so that they will be seen by others to be doing them and gain some kind of respect. They ask for privilege because of who they are and because of their place in the world and yet their heart is not where it should be....but they are seen. As the Gospel recounts the story, after saying those harsh words Jesus sat down and he was in a place where he could see what people were putting in the treasury....where he could see what people were giving and what they were offering. He saw the rich putting in large sums of money and as it has been suggested, he saw them putting in to the treasury out of their abundance, out of what was left over and then he saw a widow putting in two copper coins, not out of her abundance but out of what she had. We have heard that story told and Gospel recounted over the years and it has a couple of lessons at least for us, but one that is certain is about motivation. This morning I want to speak about the things in your life that are not necessarily public and what we might call public knowledge.

Firstly, I would like to ask you if there is anything in your life now or that has been in the past and that you do for God and that you have hardly ever spoken a word about and most people would never even know it? In Quebec City one of my colleagues and I became close friends. This same friend has an adopted son. I came to know some of his parishioners and he knew most of mine. A year or so after I was ordained we each adopted beagles, sisters to each other. Whenever we would go out somewhere together the question would come up about who was going to look after his son and the dogs. Each and every time the name XXXX would be mentioned and sure enough XXXXX loved to come and watch over the dogs and take care of his son. I knew very little about XXXXX except that she bought her clothes at the nearly new sale at the church and she drove a very basic car with no frills whatsoever and where she lived was

modest and humble. What I learned in time were things that I never about XXXXX and perhaps few knew. She was always the one whom the shut ins and the elderly could call upon to take them to a doctor's appointment or to get groceries or just about whatever it was that came up. I was surprised but not surprised when I heard about those things. My colleague asked me one day if I knew anything more about her. I said no, not really. He went on to say that she was a millionaire. I asked where she got her fortune. He then told me what her maiden name was and nothing more needed to be said. Generous as generous could be, in ways that few knew about and when thinking of what that was all about...she lived her life in that way because her only motivation in doing the good things that she did was to offer to God what she had and what she had been blessed with, and not to win the praise and not to win the applause and the acclaim of others. Of you and me, is there anything that we do for God and that would come as a surprise to most of the people that know us? I hope so....I truly hope so. And the reason that others don't know is not because it is little or insignificant or because it brings us embarrassment but instead because it really is just about what we are giving to God for the work that God would have us to be part of. Not to be morbid but wouldn't it be a good commentary about us if when we have passed from this life into the next life it becomes known that we did something or were part of something for God, and it was a way of reaching out and of touching lives or a profound expression of faith and the reason that it was never known much was because in the end it was about God and what God had called us to and we did it not for applause and not for acclaim but simply because that was what God had called us to.

Secondly this morning, going a bit deeper and asking a related but different question, in your life what is showing of your heart? The Gospel described two different stories of the heart. One story involved those who were caught up in themselves for lack of better words. They did

things to look good and for others to believe that they were ever so close to God and yet the things that they did and gave up were not about God and instead they were about themselves...and Jesus called them out on it and named it and he was speaking about the heart. A poor widow came forward and probably discreetly and without fanfare and without notice she did what she needed to do on her journey of faith and in her relationship with God and in so doing she told a different story of the heart. Like me, when we put the cards on the table, of the things that we do for God and of the things that we do because we are Christians....followers of Jesus, some things are out there and visible for others to see and to know. We don't come in the back door of the church; we come in the front door. Yet other things are not so out there and they are not visible such as what I spoke about a moment ago. What I would like for us to think about for a moment, is what is the story of our heart that makes us do the things we do for God, known and unknown, visible and not always visible...what is the story of our heart? The way in to that question and to finding the answer might be through asking what is our motivation. God knows...God really does know every single thing that we do in God's name. There are no secrets in what we do albeit things seen and unseen, that are hidden from God. And neither is our reason or our motivation or the story of our heart hidden from God. What a healthy question it is for us to ask ourselves from time to time, every now and again; in what we are doing and what we are saying and in what we are thinking and in what we are praying that carries the mark of our faith what sincerely is the story of our heart?

I end the sermon this morning by saying that I hope you are able to say...as much as people know about me and my faith....there are some things that are unknown and things that I do in the name of Jesus. And that you say to speak of those things, there is no need as I just get on and do them. As for motivation and the story of my heart, it is a journey and it is a challenge,

but it can be nothing else than for God: not for praise, not for privilege, not for acceptance, not for applause. Friends, as we continue in doing our best to be faithful, to honour what God call us to and to know when to speak of what we do and when to not, may God bless us and walk alongside of us on this journey of faith.

Rev. Glenn H. Stone