

**Date: Sunday September 23, 2012**

**Scripture: Matthew 22:36-40**

**Title: “It All Comes Down to This”**

**The Message of Scripture (Sermon Thesis): Remembering the good, great, and faithful times after eight years of ministry at Immanuel United Church of Christ; Sedalia, MO**

**The Sharing of the Good News (The Sermon Purpose): Be assured God has us all and God’s steadfast love endures forever.**

**(Remember, it’s all about God!)**

There is an old TV commercial showing a boy in a baseball cap with a ball and a glove and he is pretending to be in a big game. He is pitching. The voice over says, “It all comes down to this,” implying that it is the bottom of the ninth with two outs and a full count. One pitch to go. Oh yeah, there is a Pepsi machine in the background. Like I said, it is a TV commercial and the idea is you have to have a Pepsi for the big moment in the big game. Well, we don’t have any Pepsi, but we could say, right here and now at Immanuel United Church of Christ, that for us it all comes down to this.

I don’t think I have shared this next story here in worship. I know I have shared it other places recently and have shared it with some of you personally, but I don’t think I have told it here. If I have told it here, that’s OK, it is a wonderful story to tell and to hear again. There was a man hiking in the mountains and the path he was on began to give way. The man and the rocks beneath him began sliding down the mountain. The man started to roll and tumble. It was all he could

do to keep his bearings and finally to reach out and grab a small tree growing out of the mountain. There he was, hanging on to this small tree several hundred feet up. He mustered the strength to yell out, “Help, can anybody help me?” Almost immediately God’s voice boomed back. “Let go of the tree, I have you.” The man hung there a few seconds more and then he yelled out again, “Can anybody else help me?”

I tell that story today because I am sure that man was thinking that his life was coming down to that one moment on the mountain. I also share the story because we have a tendency to do what he did. We find ourselves in a predicament and we cry out. And then when the solution is right before us, even when the presence of God Almighty is evident to us, we have a tendency to miss, or even dismiss God. Yet we can be assured, as the Psalmist declares, the Lord is good and God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Well, I have been pondering the words of the Psalmist and the idea that, “It all comes down to this,” as I was preparing for today’s sermon. I tried thinking of the right words to share today, the right pastoral thoughts to offer, the right images to lift up, but it soon became clear that I wasn’t going to have that magnificently inspired message to share for this “it all comes down to this” moment. However, what I ended up doing throughout most of my pondering and preparation for this sermon was to reminisce about these past years that we have shared here at Immanuel United Church of Christ and I have been reflecting on memories and the honor and privilege I have felt serving as your pastor and teacher. I have bragged

about this place to numerous folks numerous times. It is good to think back over cherished memories.

And keeping the baseball imagery from the Pepsi commercial alive, let me share that I was fortunate enough to be at George Brett's last home game as he retired from the Kansas City Royals several years back. He said that night, "The bad times are now the good times, the good times are now the great times." I can relate to that feeling except, we really didn't have any bad times. We have had good times and great times, and most of all we have very faithful and faith filled times. So as I worked on this morning's sermon and recalled the last eight years of ministry, I began listing some of our good, great, and faithful times:

I remember, one Sunday morning, shortly before worship, I went into the library to have my blood pressure checked. I still don't know exactly how it happened, but on my way out of the library, I got the door locked and suddenly realized I couldn't get it unlocked. I was locked in the library with Leora Bremer, who serves faithfully as our parish nurse. We had all of 10 minutes to go before worship. What I really remember about that experience is how it seemed like the whole congregation gathered around the library door; all the people of God were looking through the window laughing and pointing with comments like, "Look, the pastor's locked in the library!" Finally, thanks to the valiant efforts of many people, we got the door unlocked in time for worship. Now this might be too much information, but I shared that morning and will share again today that I needed to go to the bathroom after I got out of the library, but I was afraid to lock, or even close,

anymore doors.

As I mentioned, I had been thinking about children's time and the surprise bag. I fondly recall the many times I have set here with the children for children's time and we have laughed hard because kids say the darnedest things. I also remember occasions where we could have gone home early from worship because the children, with their thoughts and observations, spoke the faithful word of God clearly and concisely.

I am constantly reminded of the countless hours given by volunteers for ministries and projects embraced by this congregation. I am amazed and grateful for your willingness to help.

I honestly cannot say I recall all the times that our administrative assistant, Minerva Taylor has helped me out because most of the time she was helping me with something I had forgotten. I know that she strives to constantly mind the store.

I think about German Dinners, carry in dinners, adult study groups, our lay led Bible study group, Bible school, pastor's Bible study gatherings, council meetings, committee meetings, the work at Open Door, and the ordinary and very out of the ordinary conversations in the pastor's study, in your homes, and in hospital rooms that provided extraordinary insight into your lives and the presence of God in our lives. It is an honor to walk with all of you in your faith journeys.

I recall the inspirational musical messages provided by John Kritos and our choir. I remember many of our guest musicians that have shared their talents with

us through the years.

Of course, I think a lot about our Food 4 Kids ministry. I recall sitting with dedicated volunteers that first day in 2006 waiting on children to show up. We had three kids on that first day; we had decided if we fed one child that would be worthwhile. Now, seven years later, having served hundreds of kids and adults, and over twenty-five thousands meals, our Food 4 Kids ministry reaches into the future because it is a seed planting ministry that is clearly growing and it is a pure example of what we are called to do as faith filled church following Jesus Christ.

I remember catching bats in this building, especially with our sexton, Larry Whipple. Larry, not to put you on the spot, but catching bats with Larry is a real “scream,” shall we say. Seriously, I recall entering this building after Larry has cleaned and the freshness that his work brings.

I recall, besides for our very blessed worship services, gatherings in this sanctuary for funerals, weddings, and the renewal of wedding vows. I think about baptisms, communion services, confirmation Sundays and the new members that have become part of this faith community. We have hosted association meetings and community worship services in this very sacred space. I am grateful and thankful for every time we have gathered here.

I remember, and I know some of you do as well, a sermon preached on beer, pizza, and ice cream. I remember the question and answer sermon and I am still amazed by your willingness to ask your deeply insightful questions and to share

your beautiful and wonderful ideas about God.

I recall the first time I ever walked into this building and I will never forget the last time I walk out of here. This is the place where I was ordained by the church and it will be a part of me for all time, as will each of you.

This list of memories and recollections is eight years long. There are so many more to share. I don't mean to exclude even one. But my point is that in reality, our ministry doesn't come down to this moment; it comes down to every minute we have shared together over these past eight years. And it comes down to how we live our lives as we go forward from here. It comes down to the Spirit of God at work in our lives, bringing us together, holding us, and now sending us out. It comes down to following the examples of Jesus Christ as we love God and neighbor as the Gospel of Matthew so clearly reminds us. It comes down to giving thanks for God's eternal presence at all times no matter what we face in our lives.

And that goes for us as we find ourselves now in the midst of this pastoral leadership change. On that note, there are no good-byes today; just a glorious celebration of God's presence and blessings in our lives and a recommitment to our willingness to sharing those blessings wherever we go. Like always, like everything, this, too, comes down to God. And like the man on the mountain, it is time for us to let go. That's good because God has us and God's steadfast love endures forever. That's our good news. Let go and let's pray.

Almighty God,

You have us and hold us and we give you thanks. When other aspects of our lives end, your love endures and we give you thanks. As we journey on the paths of life that you call us to, you walk with us and we give you thanks. We are your children and you are our God – always – and we give you thanks. This we pray. Amen.

Offering: Through our morning offering we give thanks for God's steadfast love.

Let us give generously. The ushers will please . . .

Dedication: Lord, we ask that you accept and bless this offering this day and that it be used to tell your wonderful story of love.

Benediction: So we go forth, to places near and far, telling of Jesus and his glory, of Jesus and his love. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, go forth. Amen and Amen.