

Date: Sunday November 8, 2009

Scripture: Psalm 127 and Mark 12:38-44

Title: “Litter, Football, and God”

The Message of Scripture (Sermon Thesis): Building (or anything) without God is futile.

The Sharing of the Good News (The Sermon Purpose): Whatever our efforts in life, when we pursue them with the Lord we will know truly good news.

(Remember, it’s all about God!)

Three ministers go fishing on lake. They rent a boat. About two hours into the fishing the first minister says, “I wish we could mark this spot, this is the best fishing we have had in a long time.” The second pastor says, “I have some chalk, we could put an ‘X’ on the bottom of the boat.” After a few seconds the third pastor says, “Come on, think about it, that won’t work, we might not rent this same boat the next time” (Fishing Jokes).

I share that story this morning because I will be talking about another minister and a lake. Methodist Bishop Ken Carder writes about Lake Junaluska, North Carolina. If you know it, you know it is one of God’s serenities on Earth. If you don’t know it, you can probably picture a lake like it, cobalt blue water, rolling hills, and tall, sturdy trees that stand guard. Weaving in and out of the trees and going up and down the hills is wonderful walking trail where Ken likes to spend time. We can imagine the Katy Trail if it would surround a large lake.

One morning Ken was out walking the trail when he noticed a soft drink can. It looked so out of place; a piece of trash in the midst of beautiful grounds. The

piece of litter really troubled Ken. It had a power about it. The litter made Ken stop, stoop down, and pick it up. He carried the can with him the rest of the way along the trail, circling the lake.

The next morning on the trail Ken did not notice any other soft drink cans but he did begin to notice other pieces of small trash strewn along the trail. He found gum wrappers, candy wrappers, and even wrappers belonging on top of suckers. He picked them up, all of them. He was amazed at how much trash he found; trash that was marring the beauty of the lake.

The following morning he was better prepared for his task. He had a small bag with him. He picked up litter. Even though he had looked carefully the day before, this new day brought new trash. There was a surprisingly large amount of trash. Ken put it all into his bag. He even found another soft drink can.

This became his morning routine. Ken would go out for a walk, with his trash bag in hand, and search for and remove the litter that detracted from the beauty of the lake. He was so dedicated to this task that he collected even the smallest bits of trash. Regardless of the size, if it was trash it was subject to Ken's hands and his trash bag.

After following this routine for a few weeks along the lake trail, he began to think about broadening his focus. He decided he could go up a ways from the lake to the road that led to the lake. The opportunities to pick up trash there were greater than what the lake trail offered (Pulpit Resource). Ken wondered to himself, after

the lake trail and the road leading to the lake, what might become his next trash free territory. Ken was becoming obsessed with getting all the trash.

Now we are shifting gears. Keep the lake and the trail and the trash in the back of your mind as you think about a brand new sparkling stadium, just opened this year that includes two quarter-mile-long steel arches, a retractable roof, and plenty of glass. As the Dallas Cowboys faithful like to say, God will still be able to look down on America's Team and watch the games on Sunday afternoon – even though the stadium is in Arlington, TX and not Dallas, TX. “We wanted this stadium to have our traditional hole in the roof,” said Jerry Jones, the team owner.

The new \$1.1 billion stadium, first estimated to cost \$650 million is the largest and most expensive stadium ever built in the NFL. The stadium will seat 80,000 fans on an average day and will accommodate up to 100,000 people for special events, such as the Super Bowl. The new stadium also features the world's largest movable glass walls, field-level corporate suites, numerous bars and restaurants throughout, and open-air end zones where fans only have to pay \$40 to stand and watch the game (football.ballparks.com). The features of the stadium go on and on in this state of the art facility.

And parking; there is plenty of parking available with room for up to twenty four thousand cars on game day with the cost to park anywhere from \$40 to \$75 dollars per vehicle. No, it's not cheap going to a game at this new stadium. The estimate is that a family of four will spend around \$500 for a fairly conservative day at the game (football.ballparks.com). You don't get a \$1.1 billion dollar plus

stadium built for the future with cheap prices.

I share this today because I could see how, like Ken walking the trail around the lake and becoming obsessed with trash; Jerry Jones has become obsessed with building the biggest and best stadium. In fact he said, and I quote, *“It happens to be the biggest stadium on Planet Earth. This is the Coliseum of Rome in sports. Size does have something to do with it. This building, it does have the opportunity to be, I guess, next to the White House or the Capitol.”* His words.

Now, we shift gears one more time. Texas has not been immune to disasters. On March 28, 2000 a Tornado struck a damaging blow to Fort Worth destroying homes, skyscrapers, churches, and businesses. Five and 1/2 years later, on September 24, 2005, Hurricane Rita struck the Gulf Coast of Texas with homes lost and residents displaced. Then, in 2006, the city of Arlington, TX had disaster scale damage erupt, disturbing hundreds of lives, destroying 104 homes belonging to 312 residents, forcing the evacuation of an estimated 871 residents from several destroyed apartment complexes, obliterating 32 businesses, everything from restaurants to tire stores to banks to motels. This was an easily preventable unnatural disaster, yet it was allowed to occur, even sanctioned and paid for by the citizens of Arlington, TX and the surrounding county, some of whom may have even voted to pay for their own destruction.

And for what has all this destruction occurred? A school; a new highway; a hospital; an airport; a military base? No, an untold number of lives have been direly disrupted for that new football stadium for the team that some locals call America's team, the one God watches. Yes, a sports palace, a private for profit business was built on a graveyard of personal destruction the likes of which, had Mother Nature

wreaked such havoc, the President would have declared it a Federal Disaster Area with FEMA dispatched to administer aid to all the victims. But, since this is a manmade disaster, the aid to the victims has been meager. Homeowners were paid just a few thousand dollars more than fair market value even though the zoning was changed to commercial value.

Yet, despite this disaster taking place to hundreds of homeowners, residents, and business owners, many of whom have filed suit against the city and the county, the only stories we hear about are the huge video board within the stadium getting hit by a football and complaints that the owner's suite is right in the middle of the field and that might disrupt play. We hear nothing about lives wrecked in the interest of big business. And why would we when Jerry Jones says this about complaints concerning the big board and his owner's suite. And again I quote, "I built this stadium. So I want the best seat in the house. The players can play around me." He continues, "With my leather seating, marble countertops, two deluxe bathrooms, six flat-screen TVs and full-service wait staff, I fail to see the problem" (durangotexas). Beware of the scribes who like to . . . have the best seats . . . and places of honor . . . They devour widows' houses . . ." (Mark 12:38-40, NRSV).

Let's go back to the lake. One day Ken walked along the lake road with trash bag in hand. He found himself rather disappointed that he could walk a considerable distance finding only a few pieces of trash. He looked even harder as he continued along his route. Within just a few minutes, he passed another person. The man asked, "Have you ever seen such an incredibly spectacular sunrise as the one we had this morning?" Ken had not noticed that there was a sunrise. He

thought to himself, you don't see a sunrise when you are looking at your feet (Pulpit Resource).

“How about those roses,” the man asked? “What roses,” Ken wondered? He had just crawled under some bushes in the direction the man was pointing in order to retrieve an old potato chip wrapper, but he sure didn't notice any roses. Of course, he now realized, it is hard to notice the roses when you are under them, and behind them, and digging trash out of them. “And the lake,” the passer-by exclaimed! “It is as smooth as glass this morning.” Ken hadn't made it to the lake yet, he was still searching for trash along the road and in the bushes.

Whether we pick up trash, build a new stadium, or do something in between, we will see what we want to see and will usually find what we are looking for. All the while we miss out on much of what is going on around us that is really important. As a human race we get caught up in the glitz and glamour of life. We find ourselves drawn to the bigger is better approach to living. We often cling to the story that makes the headline. But behind every story is another story. Behind the bright flashing lights or the glimmering steel and glass, is the reality of everyday life. The bigger and better approach means something else is demolished and removed.

Jerry Jones said, “My family and I could have never imagined such a magnificent structure.” My question is, if it hadn't been imagined, how could it be built (durangotexas)? Let's look beyond the unimagined to the real. Let's ask ourselves, what we are so focused on finding and how does that keep us from seeing

what we really need to see. And let us remember, as the Psalmist wrote, “Unless the Lord builds the house, (and may I insert the word stadium), those who build it labor in vain” (Psalm 127:1-5). So this day I remind us to always walk with the Lord, build with the Lord, and fish with the Lord. When we do, truly good news will be ours. Let us pray.

Lord,

As we put together the building blocks of our lives, remind us to include you in all we do. With you, we accomplish good that is beyond measure. Without you, our accomplishments aren't worth being measured. In all things, your presence is what matters. This we pray, Amen.

Offering: Our giving can help make known the presence of God to others. Let us give with God's presence in mind. The ushers will please . . .

Dedication: Lord, accept and bless this offering this day and we hope all of its uses are for your purposes and your promises. This we pray in Jesus name, Amen.

Benediction: Let us go forth, journeying with God, trusting in God, and giving thanks for all the many blessings of God. Go forth. Amen and Amen.

Sources:

DurangoTexas Blog; www.durangotexas.com; 2009.

Fishing Jokes Website; www.fishingjokes.com; 2009.

Football Stadium Website; www.football.ballparks.com; 2009.

Holy Bible – New Revised Standard Version; Harper Bibles: San Francisco; 2007.

Pulpit Resource; Logos Productions: Inver Grove Heights, MN; 2008.