

Just Do It

Texts: Galatians 6:2-10, Matthew 7:1-12
Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church – October 18, 2020
Rev. Michael F. Atzert

This morning, we are going to talk about loving our neighbors, about treating others with respect and kindness and gentleness. Doing unto others as we would have them do unto us. As we draw ever closer to Election Day and see the division in our country – and how awful people on both sides can be and have been, I think it is important for these reminders once again. Following November 3rd, regardless of who wins, we are going to need to remember sermons and Scriptures and stories like this. For we need to come together in love – we need to return to the days of respecting one another and appreciating others for who they are. Our reminder this morning comes from a story that I received via email back at the beginning of 2003. It has sat in a folder on my computer for the last 17 years, just waiting to be opened and used as a great reminder of the good in people.

“At a fundraising dinner for a school that serves learning-disabled children, the father of one of the school's students delivered a speech that would never be forgotten by all who attended. After extolling the school and its dedicated staff, he offered a question. “Everything God does is done with perfection. Yet, my son, Shay, cannot learn things as other children do. He cannot understand things as other children do. Where is God's plan reflected in my son?”

The audience was stilled by the query. The father continued. "I believe," the father answered, "that when God brings a child like Shay into the world, an opportunity to realize the Divine Plan presents itself. And it comes in the way people treat that child."

Then, he told the following story: Shay and his father had walked past a park where some boys Shay knew were playing baseball. Shay asked, "Do you think they will let me play?" Shay's

father knew that most boys would not want him on their team. But the father understood that if his son were allowed to play it would give him a much-needed sense of belonging.

Shay's father approached one of the boys on the field and asked if Shay could play. The boy looked around for guidance from his teammates. Getting none, he took matters into his own hands and said, "We are losing by six runs, and the game is in the eighth inning. I guess he can be on our team and we'll try to put him up to bat in the ninth inning." In the bottom of the eighth inning, Shay's team scored a few runs but was still behind by three.

At the top of the ninth inning, Shay put on a glove and played in the outfield. Although no hits came his way, he was obviously ecstatic just to be on the field, grinning from ear to ear as his father waved to him from the stands. In the bottom of the ninth inning, Shay's team scored again. Now, with two outs and bases loaded, the potential winning run was on base. Shay was scheduled to be the next at-bat. Would the team actually let Shay bat at this juncture and give away their chance to win the game?

Surprisingly, Shay was given the bat. Everyone knew that a hit was all but impossible because Shay didn't even know how to hold the bat properly, much less connect with the ball. However, as Shay stepped up to the plate, the pitcher moved a few steps to lob the ball in softly so Shay could at least be able to make contact. The first pitch came and Shay swung clumsily and missed. The pitcher again took a few steps forward to toss the ball softly toward Shay. As the pitch came in, Shay swung at the ball and hit a slow ground ball to the pitcher. The pitcher picked up the soft grounder and could easily have thrown the ball to the first baseman. Shay would have been out and that would have ended the game.

Instead, the pitcher took the ball and threw it on a high arc to right field, far beyond reach of the first baseman. Everyone started yelling, "Shay, run to first. Run to first." Never in his life

had Shay ever made it to first base. He scampered down the baseline, wide-eyed and startled. Everyone yelled "Run to second, run to second!" By the time Shay was rounding first base, the right fielder had the ball. He could have thrown the ball to the second baseman for a tag. But the right fielder understood what the pitcher's intentions had been, so he threw the ball high and far over the third baseman's head. Shay ran toward second base as the runners ahead of him deliriously circled the bases toward home.

As Shay reached second base, the opposing shortstop ran to him, turned him in the direction of third base, and shouted, "Run to third!" As Shay rounded third, the boys from both teams were screaming, "Shay! Run home!" Shay ran home, stepped on home plate and was cheered as the hero, for hitting a "grand slam" and winning the game for his team.

"That day," said the father softly with tears now rolling down his face, "the boys from both teams helped bring a piece of the Divine Plan into this world."

And now, a footnote to the story. We all send thousands of jokes through e-mail without a second thought, but when it comes to sending messages regarding life choices, people think twice about sharing. The crude, vulgar, and sometimes the obscene pass freely through cyberspace, but public discussion of decency is too often suppressed in school and the workplace. We all have thousands of opportunities a day to help realize your God's plan. So many seemingly trivial interactions between two people present us with a choice: Do we pass along a spark of the Divine? Or do we pass up that opportunity, and leave the world a bit colder in the process?" (Source Unknown. Email 01/12/2003).

So the last part of that refers to the time when we would all forward jokes and stories and anecdotes to one another through email. The crude and obscene stuff of 2020 can come in the form of stories that are shared on Facebook, comments on someone else's posts. How are you

passing along a spark of the Divine? How are you showing the unconditional, agape' love of Jesus Christ to others in the way that you speak, act, and post? We have to do better! We have to set the example of pointing to the presence of God in our world. As the famous sneaker maker so eloquently says, "Just do it." Let us pray...

Master Designer, we thank You for Your Divine plan and purpose for us and for Your world. Help us, we pray, to do our part – to look for signs of Your working and moving so that we can respond in faith. Increase our faith – our love – and our service that we might bring Your presence to this hurting world. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.