

“What About Him?”

Isaiah 25: 6-8

John 21: 20-25

April 22, 2007

The Rev. Patrick Day
First Presbyterian Church
Lake Forest, Illinois
The 3rd Sunday of Easter

It was a small town and a small church and that church had Mildred. Mildred was the official Church Gospel. She had run unopposed for re-election for the last twenty years and was the self appointed officer of moral behavior for the entire community. Mildred saw it as her duty not only to take notes of happenings, but to make sure everybody else knew what she noticed. She saw it as her personal responsibility to share that information. If Mildred didn't quite have her facts straight, that would be someone else's responsibility.

Frank joined the church and as a relatively new member one day Mildred happened to see Frank's old pick-up truck sitting outside the local bar at noon. Mildred decided that Frank had a drinking problem, and she thought everybody ought to know about Frank's drinking problem. She passed the word around that Frank was an alcoholic. One day at church in front of all her witnesses she confronted Frank as well. Frank was a man of few words; in this case, no words. He didn't try to defend himself, he didn't deny it, and he didn't try to explain. He simply looked at Mildred for a second, then turned and walked away. Later that evening he parked his old pick-up truck outside Mildred's house; and he walked home and left his truck there till morning.

Here we are at the end of the gospel of John, the passage we read last week told us how Jesus reconnects with Peter and gives Peter the charge “feed my sheep, tend my lambs, tend my sheep”.

Peter sees John walking up and he says, “what about him?”

Jesus says “If it's my will that he remains until I come, what is that to you? You follow me.”

A rumor began to spread among the community that John would not die. Jesus had said that to Peter. Jesus' track record would show that he probably was not going to start spreading rumors. Where do you think this story started?

Here Jesus is, telling Peter not to worry about John and that he has plans for John, that Peter should just follow him. Peter, completely missing the point, starts saying “John's not going to die...did you know John's not going to die...Jesus says John's not going to die!” Jesus never said that. Jesus' whole point is: Don't worry about him. What about him? Don't worry about that. You follow me. Follow me.

Jesus has plans for John. Peter's role is to do exactly what Jesus said. To tend to his sheep, to start being that rock that Jesus said he would be; be that rock on which Jesus would build his church.

John's role is to be a witness. John's role is to be the last of the original disciples around to be able to say: I was there and I saw it.

What about him? *What about him?*

Jesus is pretty clear. Just worry about yourself. You follow me; you do what I called you to do. Don't worry about anyone else. Just do what I've called you to do. God says that to each of us.

Today we celebrate the work of this confirmation class. I can tell each of you that God has marvelous things in store for you. Your journey and your relationship with God will not look exactly like anybody else's, and who cares? God has called each of you individually, by name. And what he charges each of you to do is different from the person sitting next to you.

That's not only true for these people in the first rows; it's true for all of us. What God has called each of us into is not like the person sitting next to us. If you think, as you look around this room, that someone might not be exactly where they should be, what is that to you? Worry about yourself. Worry about what God has called you to do. Don't worry about anyone else.

Don't worry about anyone else? That's not quite true is it? If this massacre at Virginia Tech taught us anything, it is that we should be worried about those around us. We should be worried *for* those around us. This was not a case where people came out and said they never saw it coming. This is a case where people did worry. Various people, as they met this young man, they did try. They did. They did what they were supposed to do. The unfortunate thing and I know unfortunate doesn't even begin to describe it, is it did not work. It did not work.

But it clearly demonstrates that we are supposed to worry. Yes, God has called each of us individually, and God has called each of us on a journey that is unique and particular to our own lives. God does not call us to be on any journey alone. God does not call us to ignore the people around us as we set off on our own journey.

That's the challenge. How do you know? How do you know when to mind your own business, and not to worry about anyone else? How do you know when you should get involved? I wish I had a formula, but the only way I can respond to that is that on some level I think you do know. If you really stop and think about what is going on, you will know.

When I was in seminary, the church where I did my field education work had a men's homeless shelter that was run out of the church. Every Sunday morning there was a worship service in that shelter before the men left for the day. There was a man who worked there named John. John had been addicted to heroine, been homeless himself, been a resident to that very shelter, and he managed to free himself from that addiction, and he managed to find work, and housing. Out of gratitude for all that God had done for him on his journey, he was back at that shelter every Sunday morning, serving food and helping to lead worship.

One Sunday he wasn't there. I didn't think much about it, until the next Sunday he was not there again. The third, fourth, fifth, and the sixth Sunday he was not there. He returned on

the seventh Sunday. He looked terrible. He shared with us exactly what we thought might have happened had happened.

He started using drugs again, missed work, and missed his rent. Each week I would walk in and see that he was not there, and I would think: “I ought to say something to someone; I ought to ask someone if they’ve seen him.”

Then I thought, “Dude, mind your own business.” The next week I’d think the same things, think about it for a while longer but told myself to mind my own business. But when I saw him on the seventh Sunday, I knew. Each week in-between I knew. Deep down I think we know when we need to get involved, and we know when we need to mind our own business.

You see that your neighbors have now ordered pizza seven nights in a row to be delivered to their house; you know to mind your business. You see an ambulance outside your neighbor’s house; you know. We all know. Very rarely is it as clean cut as a pizza truck or ambulance, but the bottom line for us is that God has a place for each person at his table. Isaiah says that God will make a feast for all people. That’s *all* people. Not just the people who vote a certain way or look a certain way, or talk a certain way. That’s *all* people. When it comes to the things where we know we need to mind our own business, then we need to just mind our own business and not worry. Jesus would say the same thing to us as he said to Peter.

Peter asks, “Well, Jesus, what about him?”

Jesus replies, “What about him? I have plans for him. I have plans for her, and I have plans for you. Pay attention to the plans I have for you.”

At the same time Isaiah says, “I will make a feast for all people.” *All* people. There are people in this world that do not know they are welcome. For those people, whether they are strangers, whether they are neighbors, whether they are family members....we should not mind our own business, but make sure they know that God has a place for them too.

Amen