

SERMON FOR SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2009
ST. PAUL'S CHURCH – MICHIGAN

Following the death of Senator Ted Kennedy it seemed much of the news in the country came to be centered on the senator's life, and the senator's family, and his politics and then his funeral, including the protocol and the formality. In a sense, it was like time stood still for a few days. Come Friday evening millions watched, as there was a service at the JFK Library in Boston and then even more watched on Saturday morning as the funeral took place at the Roman Catholic Basilica. When we think of it for a moment, what do you suppose was the fascination? I might be wrong but it seemed that interest in watching what was happening crossed political lines and drew a large cross section of interest. Was the fascination to see what celebrities and high profile persons and political figures were there and whom they were speaking to and what they wore? Perhaps! What do you think of the suggestion that people watched to see what was going to be said and what was going to happen because they wanted to find a way of understanding and then defining and then coming to grips with what it means to be a good person and what it means to be recognized and respected by others and then somehow combined with those things....to be a person who professed a faith. I think that deep down we are curious to know the real answer and with a good degree of certainty what we have to do in order to be a good person, what we have to do so as to be respected and what is it that God expects of us and calls us to. I like to watch the funerals of people that have had a high profile in the public because, especially where faith is involved because like so many other people I want to know what does it mean to be a good person, what does it mean to live the life that God has called me to and then what does it mean to live my faith and to live by faith. This particular Sunday, spoken through the words of the collect

that is our common prayer and then through the first reading and second reading, maybe we have something of an answer to those questions.

Firstly in the collect for this Sunday we prayed these words just a few moments ago, "...so you never forsake those who make their boast of your mercy..." We watch a large public funeral like last week or maybe like we did twelve years ago when Lady Diana died and we ask to be a good person....to have a certain faith....to be whom God has called me to be, what do I have to do...perhaps the collect is suggesting that it has something to do with where we put our boast or how our pride is distributed. Within the next twelve months we are going to be looking back on our history of 125 years and we are going to be looking at where it is that we are now and then where we will be going. A word that is going to be used a good bit is the word 'faithful'. We are going to hear about people who were faithful in terms of what they did and what they gave and the same for families and as we use the word faithful we are going to be hearing about ministries that have been 'faithful'. Along with that we are going to be painting the picture of a church that is proud and hopeful and optimistic and confident. In our conversations in the year to come let us also be speaking and making our boast, if you will, of God as we speak of faithfulness and what has been our gift of a rich history. Two people speak to us about their lives. They speak to us about what they have lived and what they have lived through and they speak about their faith and they speak about what it is that has afforded them strength. The one person speaks about prayer that has brought comfort and they speak about a faith that has helped them through the times in the wilderness and they speak about Scripture that has come to have special meaning for them. And without saying much more they leave it at that. And the second person says pretty much the same as the first person with the recognition that it has not been so much them and their faith but it has also been God, and God working through them. . And so which person's witness or

testimony touches us most? Just one of the reasons that Mother Teresa's life and ministry has meant much to me is that despite what she accomplished and the number of lives that she touched and that she saved, she used to say that none of it would have been possible, if not for God's blessing. So we prayed in the collect "so you never forsake those who make their boast of your mercy...".

Secondly part of the answer of what it means to be a good person and respected and to live a life that God calls us to might be found in the words written in our first lesson from Proverbs, that book which is of wisdom. The words that might speak to those questions that we are asking are these: a good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favour is better than silver or gold. Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor. In his writing of the Scriptures in *The Message*, Eugene Petersen has worded those verses in this way: a sterling reputation is better than striking it rich' a gracious spirit is better than money in the bank. The rich and the poor shake hands as equals, God made them both. Generous hands are blessed hands, because they give bread to the poor. If the collect mentioned the words that we speak, then the first reading mentions the priorities that we keep. A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches...those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor. Twelve years ago Lady Diana died five days before Mother Teresa died in 1997. The world was shocked by both deaths and we watched as both women were mourned and remembered and then as appropriate funeral services were held. When we think about it on the outside Lady Diana and Mother Teresa had little in common and also much in common. One was part of royalty and travelled the world and had doors opened to her that were closed to most. The other lived a life of intentional poverty, ministering to the sick and the dying. We loved both women and if together they spoke a word to us or showed us anything about life and what it means to be good and

means to be respected and to live life the way God intended...then the word was about priorities and just where we place our priorities. A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches....those who are generous are blessed. Looking down the road fifty years from now or seventy five years from now or maybe less or maybe longer, how do you think you and I are going to be remembered, when others speak of our priorities?

Thirdly, part of the answer to the question of what it means to be a good person, respected and to live a life that God calls us to is to be found in the second lesson from James. Specifically I am thinking of the words in that lesson, "What good is it...if you say you have faith but do not have works? So faith by itself, if it has no works is dead". What it is that we speak, our priorities, and then what it means to be good, respected and living a Godly life is determined by what we do....so faith by itself if it has no works is dead. We watch the funerals of special and public persons on the television or whatever it is that we catch coverage of it and inevitably we hear of their works, the things that they have done, the lives that they have touched, the things that they have done and yet never spoken much about if at all and we say to ourselves that we never knew that. Perhaps those things are so much related and went into them being the good person and the respected person who lived the life that God had called them to.

This morning I have chosen to end my sermon by saying this. I am not so sure that when any of us die, our funerals will be carried live or even given much coverage by the news media. But that does not mean either that we will not be considered good people by our friends and family, and those who knew us or that we were respected, or that our lives were lived as God called us to and in a way that was a reflection of who God is. In the end what determines those things and I hunch that we already know; is what we speak and the words that we choose when we decide to make our boast, and the priorities that we keep and the way that those priorities are

ordered....what is important and what really isn't so important and then what we do....what we do when the words have been spoken and they have been heard...what we do.....those are really the things that will speak about how we are and the life that we have lived.

Rev. Glenn H. Stone