

“LET’S GO TO THE MOVIES!
V – DEAD POETS SOCIETY”
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Elkton United Methodist Church
August 18, 2019

Philippians 4:4-8

Matthew 6:25-34

It was about this time of year, the time when school was starting. At a very staid, very tradition-bound boarding school, classes were starting for a new semester. The teachers were all distinguished men, very academic, looking and acting more like college professors than high school teachers. They were steeped in tradition and in traditional ways of teaching and learning.

That year, however, a new English teacher had joined the faculty, a man by the name of Keating. When the students entered his room on the first day of classes, they expected the usual – a stuffy professor-type man ready to bore them with the basics of learning English. Piled high on their desks were the classic books on English, literature and poetry.

Oh, were they in for a surprise! Mr. Keating was unlike anything or any teacher they had ever experienced before. He was seen by the administration and

the other teachers as a bit of a “loose cannon.” His students, on that first day, had no earthly idea how different this class would be.

What I’m describing is the plot of the wonderful movie “Dead Poets Society.” I’m not sure how many of you have seen it, but you may know that it starred Robin Williams as Mr. Keating, and it was filmed not far from here – on the campus of St. Andrews School in Middletown, Delaware.

The earliest scenes of the movie are what I just described – these boys learning really quickly that Mr. Keating was not your “run of the mill” teacher. In a very early scene, he has the boys take out their poetry textbook and turn to a page in the front on which an essay entitled “How to Read Poetry” was written. When they got there, he shockingly told them to “rip it out!” Rip the page out of the textbook – because, he said, it was so restrictive – it took all of the passion and power out of reading poetry. So, first with hesitation, but then grabbing the gusto, the boys all ripped the page out of their books. That was the first sign this was not going to be an ordinary English class.

Other times Mr. Keating would take the boys out of the classroom to discover learning in a new way – whether it was on a soccer field, or walking around the campus, reciting verses of poetry and prose. His goal was to help them be all that they could be, to embrace life, to “sieve the day!” “Carpe diem!”

One day, he found a very unique way to invite them to see things in a different way and to find their voice. Take a look at the screen and you’ll see what he did.

Film clip from “Dead Poets Society”

Oh, Mr. Keating made a great point. It helps to look at things in life in a different way and to find your own voice. Standing on his desk was his way of inviting them to that journey.

Well, friends, in many ways we, people of faith, are already on top of the desk, if you will, because we already see life in a different way. We see life through the eyes of faith, we see life through the lens of Jesus.

So for a few moments together this morning, let's consider how we do that, or don't do that, at times.

First, because of our faith, we face life differently, day by day. For us as people of faith, life is not just a drudging journey, day after day, to be endured – rather life is a gift, which, day by day, we cherish.

And life is not something we tackle on our own, in fact, we know that we are never alone, and no matter what life brings our way, God is with us.

We believe and trust what Jesus said in this morning's Gospel lesson – that we have no reason to ultimately fear or worry, because of God's love and care for us. You heard him talk about how much God loves the birds and flowers – and how much more God loves each of us, so we have no need to fear.

All of those things – God's never-ending presence with us, and his unending love and care for us – indeed, enable us to see life differently, and live life

differently than one who has no faith. They enable us to see life day by day positively, with faith, trust and hope.

Knowing that God will always make a way, gives us the freedom to live life fully, passionately, and faithfully.

I know that some of you here will recognize the name Jim Valvano when I say it. Jim Valvano was a college basketball coach at North Carolina State a number of years ago – an excellent college basketball coach. I think he was probably not unlike Mr. Keating – he coached his players not just in the game of basketball, but in the game of life – teaching them to see life differently, to find their voice, to fully engage in the game, yes, but also to fully engage in life. He was a great teacher and leader.

Sadly, Jimmy V (as he was known) was stricken with cancer in 1992. He fought a courageous battle before dying a year later. But before he died, he was honored on national television, and to the viewing audience, here is some of what he said:

“Today, I fight a different battle. You see, I have trouble walking and I have trouble standing for a long period of time. Cancer has taken away a lot of my physical abilities. Cancer is attacking and destroying my body. But what cancer cannot touch is my mind, my heart and my soul. I have faith in God . . . and hope that things might get better for me. But even if they don’t, I promise you this. I will never ever give up. I will never ever quit. And if cancer gets me . . . then I’ll try my best to go to heaven and I’ll try my best to be the best coach they’ve ever seen up there. (Then, pointing to the 1983 Championship Team, he said:) I learned a great lesson from these guys, they amazed me! They did things I wasn’t sure they could do, because they absolutely refused to give up! . . . That’s the lesson I learned from them and that’s the message I leave with you: ‘Never give up! Never, ever give up!’” (James W. Moore, *Attitude is Your Paintbrush*, p. 65)

Like the great Jimmy V., because we have faith in Jesus Christ, we see things differently, and we never give up – no matter what. Perched on the desks of our faith in Christ, we see life differently and we live life differently.

And that’s the second thing I want to point out this morning – we do live life differently because of our faith in Christ – or at least we should. People should be able to tell that there is something different about us because of our faith.

Did you hear that beautiful passage from Philippians that Bethany read? We are called to think on good things, lovely things, worthy things – and then let them into our hearts and minds, and let them affect the way we live everyday. When we do that, people can tell there is something different about us – and that something different is our faith in and commitment to Jesus Christ.

Granted, that is not always easy to do in the world in which we live. We all know that our world is filled with increasingly self-centered people, in it for themselves and themselves alone. There's a lot of evil going on – we need only look at the news these past few weeks to see that. The way we treat each other does not seem to be getting better, and sadly, social media, which could be such a source for good, sometimes is nowhere near that. It's very easy to fall prey to the ways of the world, but that is not what we're called to do or who we're called to be as disciples of Christ.

Let me tell you just how easy it is to fall prey to the ways of the world by means of a story, that I think I might have told you a long time ago, but I recently got more details about it. It's actually something that happened to Tom Williams, our organist Sharon Williams' husband. (Tom's not here today, because they're on

vacation, so I'm safe telling you – actually, he knows I'm telling you because I talked to him about it this week.)

After Tom retired from the Delaware State Police, he worked for a time in security at a local institution of higher learning. One of the things the security detail had to deal with from time to time was helping coordinate traffic and parking for big events on campus. Well, one day, Tom was doing just that. By the way, this institution has limited parking on the best of days, so on event days, it was pretty much a nightmare.

Nevertheless, the security guys were out there to help everyone find a spot and keep things running smoothly. So Tom was doing his job when a woman pulled up looking for parking. She looked like a nice enough woman, and on her car was a number of bumper stickers saying things like “Peace be with you,” “Jesus loves you,” and “I am a child of God.” So, when Tom told her she couldn't park there, and she confronted him, going quickly from irritated to irate to actually cussing at him, he was surprised. As she pulled away, Tom said, he couldn't resist, and he said, “I like your bumper stickers.” I think her face turned 10 different shades of red as she drove off, humbled.

As I always say, people are watching us. They want to see if we put our money where our mouth is, if you will. Are we who we say we are, people of faith, disciples of Christ? They'll be able to tell by how we live, and how we treat them. As people of faith, we see life differently, and in our better and best moments, we live life that way, as well.

Finally, because of our faith, we see the things we have, what we've been given, differently. We don't see what we have as our possessions, rather we see them as gifts from God, and treat them as such. We have a healthy perspective about what we've been given, knowing that God has given to them in trust, to use the best we can and for his glory.

We've heard Jesus' words about possessions – about not storing up treasures on earth, about sharing what we have been given, about keeping things in perspective, and being good stewards of what we have. And that causes us to look at life differently. Because of our faith, we can't be caught up in ads that try to convince us that a certain car will make us more important, or going to a certain school will make us better than someone else, or more diplomas makes us more worthy than others. Because of our faith, we know that using what we have, not just for ourselves, but for and with others, is a great gift of Christian love.

It's what draws us to give up vacation time to go on mission trips, to bring prom dresses here that others might use them again, to give of our time to teach Sunday School, or sing in the choir, or serve at the Community Kitchen, or donate blood, or do a thousand other good things. We give of those things because we know that God has given to us first, and we want to continue the blessing with others.

So, you see, we are already standing on Mr. Keating's desk and seeing things in a different way from those without faith. It's the life to which Christ calls us. It's an exciting life, this life of faith, a life of continual growth, where, day by day, we pray, "Lord, be thou my vision," and every day, we find our voice in new ways.

Dear friends, do not let the world put a damper on the adventure that is a life of faith. Rather, embrace your difference as a child of God and disciple of Christ, a person who sees life, lives life and gives life differently because of your faith. Believe me, when you do, others will see it, and maybe, just maybe, want to find that faith for themselves too. May it be so.

Amen.

