



Mount Carmel Lutheran Church

Uncle Glenn, A Builder of Community

by Rev. John Strommen on John 16:12-15

Sunday, June 16, 2019

Yesterday I attended the funeral of a notable father. His name was Glenn Rambow, and he was Heidi's uncle. (pic #1). Uncle Glenn was a farmer out by Willmar, a WWII vet, and a jovial, funny guy as far as I knew him. But I want to share with you a portrait of Glenn that was shared yesterday at his funeral. It not only fits with Father's Day, it fits with what I want to say about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Glenn was known for being a conservationist farmer, working always to nurture the soil he tilled and the animals he cared for.

That is, of course, the essence of a good father as well: being a steward of the lives that you are given, nourishing and protecting them - whether it's your own children, pets or livestock in your care, or the cradle of life itself: the soil of the earth. We are a part of a vast community of interconnecting relationships, which, as we shall see, is also what the Holy Trinity teaches us as well.

And Glenn was obsessed with baseball and softball, both as a player when he was younger and then as a fan, when he was older, watching his own kids and grandkids play ball for the various school and town teams. You would expect a farmer like Glenn to live his life according to the rhythms of the seasons, but his real seasons, according to all who knew him, were not summer, fall, winter, and spring, but *baseball season, playoff season, off-season* and *spring training*.

Indeed, baseball is a rich metaphor for life and the things that matter in life. It is fundamentally about play, and life without play is a dreary, heavy thing. God wants us to cultivate playfulness within our families as signs of joyful life. A father or mother set the tone for this. So, too, has our heavenly father.

But, as it was pointed out in the service by Glenn's daughter, Kathy, baseball is also a team sport that uniquely calls upon the notion of players putting the team before themselves. We even use the language of "sacrifice" to indicate this – a sacrifice bunt, a sacrifice fly. You do what is necessary to advance the interests of the team, just like a

good father makes sacrifices all along the way to advance the good of his team - his family – whether it's going to your daughter's band concert instead of playing cards with your buddies or working overtime to put food on the table.

And of course, the veterans who stormed the beaches of Normandy or fought the Battle of the Bulge sacrificed beyond imagination for the good of the big team humanity.

And that brings us to the third thing Glenn was known for: his family. Yes, he was known for his relationships to *the land* and to *baseball*, but his relationship to his family and friends was even more important. As a father and grandfather, friend and neighbor, Glenn not only loved people, he was a positive force in their lives, an encourager. How did he encourage? Well, he saw the gifts and riches in everyone else and he celebrated them openly, which makes people feel good. This was what one of his sons noticed and then gave example after example. Knowing that he had received so much from God, Glenn was humble, and able to delight in the gifts of others. To Glenn, everyone was a superman or woman in some unique way. (pic #2)

And so, Glenn would tell his daughter Kathy, who is a preacher, how proud he was of her for her message at the graveside of Heidi's dad's funeral last fall. And he would point out that no one could farm like Chester did in his bean field, and no one could fix a shore lunch like Heidi's father, Paul. No one could cook pork chops like Grandma Bertha and no one could coach like Lyle. Then there was Alan, the mailman, who carried his mail shovel, and when it had just snowed, Alan was a master at shoveling as he delivered. Can't forget his son, Steven, the high school quarterback: nobody could do ball fakes like Steven.

And so, the story about Glenn goes: with each person he knew, he celebrated something that person did really, really well. And this made him proud and happy.

This is what good fathers and mothers do, isn't it? Namely, encourage their kids with what they *can* do, not dwell on what they *can't*. But this is also true in a much broader way, for we are called as brothers and sisters in Christ to encourage and celebrate what each other can do well and nourish those gifts in each other. We build each other up.

And this is a communal dance that started with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus tells his disciples that all that his father has is now his. So, the incomparable riches of God - gifts from on high - have been downloaded into Jesus, a human being. And guess where they go from there? Just as God has shared richly with his son, God has shared with all of humanity. For as Jesus

says, all that belongs to Jesus is being shared with us through the Holy Spirit. So, each of us has gifts that God has endowed us with through the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Why? Because we have been called to be in community and partnership with God.

And it is critically important that we recognize and celebrate the giftedness of each other as children of God, and partners with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. (pic #3) Last fall, I was teaching the GPS course, and one session, I had each small group do a little exercise around celebrating each other's gifts. Each table of 5 people or so would take turns featuring one person. That one person would remain silent, while the others at her table would tell her one thing that they admired about her, or him. So, each person got to hear from the others something they admired in them.

Afterward, over a beer, I met with four of five from the class. They said, "Sharing with each other what we admired about each other was *so meaningful*. It was the best thing we've done in class the whole time we've been together." And then, a question: "How can we do more of that with each other?"

Indeed, what if we were known as a community who acted like Uncle Glenn, where we took delight in each other's gifts and worked to help each other put them to use and shine? I think you see here that with Glenn and with GPS, it's not just about the gifts that individuals are given. Sometimes we don't see what others can point out about us! And so, it's about helping each other to identify those gifts, feel good about them, and use them! And that happens in a caring community where we learn to build each other up and turn our attention to a higher purpose. That's also what good fathers and mothers do.

As Christians, we've always believed that God is three persons in one God. That's called the Holy Trinity, of course. And I hope you noticed today in our Gospel text how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate to each other and to us! First Jesus tells his disciples that the Holy Spirit is talking to them, leading them into truth and telling them whatever Jesus tells the Holy Spirit to share with us. Telling us what, exactly? Telling us of the things to come, which, for us, simply means showing us the way to go, where God is leading us to use our gifts in our lives.

But this isn't just between the Holy Spirit, Jesus and us. Jesus' father is involved, too. Jesus goes on to say that "All that the father has is mine." The Holy Spirit, then, is only sharing with us what first came from God the Father and was shared through Jesus. So, we have these relationships between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, relationships of sharing and working together as one.

And into this mix, enter us. Now, we learn through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, that God extends this sharing, this conversation, to us. (pic #4) So, we know that God shared himself with us through Jesus. We know that the divine life force from God belongs to us. We know that God is talking to us through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Are we listening?

So, the Holy Trinity is a community and we have been invited to participate in this community – one where gifts are given and affirmed, direction offered, presence and interplay are celebrated, members are encouraged.

And it should surprise us not at all that God is community when you consider what we learn in the second chapter of the Bible, in Genesis. God says, “Let *us* make humankind in *our* image, according to *our* likeness.” Did you notice three times God refers to Godself in the plural? The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have been God’s nature and identity from the beginning. God *is community*, and this is a community that works in dynamic interplay.

And choosing to enter creation as Jesus and pour out his spirit upon all flesh, God has said to us, “you’re invited to the party! You are a part of my community – you’re in on the conversations, you’re partners in the work, you’re companions in the dance, with me and each other.”

Uncle Glenn would approve! Amen.