

February 3, 2013
Epiphany 4
Text: Luke 4:31-44
Theme: "Fat Snowmen Last Longer"

Sometime ago I arrived to my office to find a shocking thing. Someone in this church, believe it or not, came into the office after I had left and hung a horribly shocking and atrocious sign on my door. The sign said, "Fat Snowmen Last Longer." Now I have no idea who would hang such a sign on their pastor's door and surely he was not referencing anyone specific, but I left that sign up on my door because the more I looked at the sign the more I have seen wisdom in it. Fat Snowmen REALLY DO Last Longer. Over the years of working with youth, I have learned to make something theological out of almost anything so here it goes with that sign.

I grew up as a fat kid. From the time I was six or seven years old I was a little porker. Some years were better and some were worse but I was always significantly overweight. My mother considered it her failing as a parent that I was fat so she used to try and excuse my weight. She would tell me that I was not fat...I was healthy. Really? I wonder how having 30 extra pounds hanging off your gut makes you more healthy. But she was a person raised during the depression when there was not always enough food. She had seen people in her community slowly waste away to nothing from not having enough, so she saw fat as healthy because that person got plenty to eat.

Fat bodies are bad. We know that obesity leads to many health problems, a lower quality of life and poor self-image. But fat is not always a bad thing. Fat wallets are nice. Fat beef makes for good steaks and even bodies need a certain

amount of fat to be healthy. Finally, fat souls are the goal for all of us. In fact, the fatter the soul, the better it is for us. As fat on bodies protects the body against starvation and provides reserves for the body to use, fat on our souls sees us through times of spiritual deprivation and demonic temptation.

So how does one get a fat soul so that he can be a snowman that lasts longer? One thing you always saw Jesus doing was going off by himself to recuperate spiritually and that is something we don't do nearly enough. Jesus communicated with his Father and spent time interacting with the Father. Retreat time, prayer time, worship time, devotion time. People spend many hours a week in the gym or at the bar or in front of the television or with the I-pad in their laps but God help us if the worship service goes over an hour and a half. And judging from the Bible Study and Sunday School attendance, most of us are far, far too busy to study God's word. It always seems like we have all the time in the world for things that either do us no good or drain away our resources but we don't have time to do the things that would build us up. As our stores of spiritual fat drain from us under the demands of life on this earth, we wither.

We teach our children these same patterns that many of us have adopted. Homework, grades and test scores have become the great false gods of our day. The expectation when I was growing up was that you got your school work done before church activities and if you didn't you made a low grade and that might teach you to get the work done next time. And what if a teacher was unreasonable? You learned to live with her because guess what. You will spend the rest of your life dealing with people who want you to put their stuff before

God. Bosses will want you to work Sundays and boyfriends and girlfriends will want you to skip church and stay late at the party and unchurched friends will not understand why going to Bible Study on Monday nights is more important than getting together to watch football. And what if...God forbid...you make a low grade? So what? God is the one who is going to lead you into the place he wants you to serve him so don't ever put worldly measures of achievement over him.

God says to Jeremiah, "do not say I am only a youth..." Jeremiah was assuming that it was his job to figure out what to say to get people to follow God and abandon their idolatry. WRONG! It is only his job to stay close to God and God will do the rest. God was going to fill Jeremiah up with everything he needed to do the job. He was fattening up his soul. God wants us to be spiritually fat too because when it comes to matters of the soul, we are like snowmen. If we wither too much we vanish. There is no warning light when faith is low. So staying spiritually fat is the way to go because fat snowmen last longer.

I know that for many of you, I am preaching to the choir. You are here almost every week and you take the time both here and during the week to fatten your souls on God's Word and Sacrament. You are fat snowmen with great spiritual reserves, but you like me have withering snowmen all around you in your lives outside these walls. What do we do with them? We can see the faith melting off of them as they run off to soccer games and take extra shifts at work and vanish every weekend to the vacation home. What can we do?

First, have confidence in Christ's word. It has great authority and power. Don't give up. You will be laughed at. You will be ignored. Eyes will roll and people will sigh because we are soooooo dumb that we just don't understand why Church is not a priority for normal people. I have spent more than 23 years proclaiming the Gospel and there are still parishioners in this congregation who believe I know very little about raising kids, worldly temptations and life in the "real world." The only advantage to being big, loud and gray is that few of them have the guts to say anything to my face so I don't have to hear it anymore. But from day one of my ministry, there have been those who want to do it their way and they want me to agree with them and so confirm them in their ignorance. You know I won't do that. I'm a fat snowman. I have tons of spiritual reserves because like Jeremiah, the Lord has filled me with his Word and his very body and blood. So, regardless of the eye rolling, harrumphing, and little gossips who buzz all around us – I continue to proclaim God's Word in all its sweetness and in all its stark, blunt, bitter truth. I do that because I have confidence in his authority.

And to stay fat, I retreat. I take time on a regular basis to withdraw and build up my reserves. I study God's Word. I go to conferences. I take several weeks a year just to focus on the upcoming Sunday services asking what God is saying to me and to this congregation. Why do I do all that? Because Fat Snowmen Last Longer!