

Sermon 2007 Lent 5

Text: Philippians 3:8-14

Theme: "Gotta Let Go of the Side of the Pool to Swim"

Hanging out in the deep end of the pool...it doesn't get cooler than that. You're not a little kid anymore who has to stay in the shallow end, paddling around with your water wings on. Your days of mothers in bright floral one pieces and big floppy brim hats are over and you are hanging out with the big kids in the deep end just as far away from those sun-screen squirting, rule abiding, safety conscious moms in lawn chairs as you can get.

There you are, floating around in the world of hot girls and ripped guys. If you're a guy, you're in a constant state of flex trying to look buff. If you're a girl, you're doing what girls do, using precious little material to accentuate their best qualities and hide everything they see as flaws. There's only one small difficulty. It is really hard to look cool while clutching the side of the pool with white-knuckle terror. But the water is deep! It is so cool to be here, but the bottom is 12 feet down and **under water!!!**

That older kid is so cool the way he seems to just effortlessly bob around in 12 feet of water. All the girls are watching him and all the boys are trying to imitate him. Okay...here goes...time to let go of the side of the pool and bob around in coolness just like that big kid. One...two...three...LET GO! Yeah...cool...oooo...start sinking...okay – okay, calmly tread water...head is sinking below the surface...tread water harder...still sinking...kick like mad...begin thrashing wildly...not cool...not cool at all...but more cool than drowning. Then the big kid is there grabbing your arm and pulling you up and back to the side of the pool...humiliation...not what you were going for...not really.

Who knew it took practice to bob around in the deep end like a cork? Who knew it takes muscles on top of muscles to tread water, keeping your whole torso up out of the water and yet making it look effortless? No one teaches you this stuff in 4th grade!!! This is just stuff that you figure out in the deep end when you're on your own, away from the floppy brimmed, sun screen squirting protectors.

Living is not like trading up in cars. You know you start out with that junker that you inherited from your uncle. Then you finally bought your first car, newer but pretty basic. As the job progresses the average person trades up and up until he reaches something that approximates his dream in automotive transportation. In life, however, things we thought were wonderful turn out to be useless and things we had no use for suddenly become invaluable. Life is more like searching through the junk drawer – never knowing what to keep, what to throw away and what might have a use that is just not apparent right now.

Paul had built a life. He was a big shot and doing quite well when everything turned upside down on him. That which he thought was important turned out to be completely unimportant. The path he was on turned out to be completely wrong. The friends he had became his enemies. Everything that he had worked so hard to achieve turned out to be what he called RUBBISH – which by the way is a euphemism. Rubbish is literally

that material that one finds in the solid waste tank at the local sewage treatment plant.

Now what? He had lived his life to obtain righteousness under the Law and he had achieved his goal. He was the cool kid in the deep end bobbing around and looking very good only to find out that his righteousness wasn't good enough. Drop a couple hundred pounds on the cool kid and see how cool he looks then. When Paul finally understood his sin...when he finally began to wrestle with the full weight of his offenses against God...he went under...he sank...he drown.

It wasn't the cool kid who pulled him to the side but one of the people he persecuted. He found himself blind and helpless with a decidedly uncool Ananias upon whom he had to rely. And then Paul had to start all over, but this time he was searching for a different kind of righteousness. This time he was looking for righteousness from God that depends on faith. That's sort of like letting go of the side of the pool and trusting that the air in your lungs will lift you up. You may not look cool...but you will float.

Righteousness from God that depends on faith is hard. There is nothing that we can do to get it. There are no steps to take, no method to follow. There is also no guarantee that it will all turn out the way we want it to turn out. When we pursue righteousness from God, it is always God's show from start to finish. The hardest part is letting go of the side of the pool and trusting God to lift you up. Even Paul admits that he had not mastered it – but he was pressing on because he had done enough of it to know that the joy far surpasses the terror.

So, here we are all hanging around the edge of the pool with Paul. There's a few of us who are letting go from time to time and feeling the unleashed power of God lifting them up. There's that cool kid Jesus out in the middle of the deep end floating around effortlessly and calling us out to be with him where we will leave behind all our fears, all our guilt and shame, all our insecurities. Let go. I dare you. Let go of the side of the pool and float out there with Jesus. Amen.