

**Sermon for the 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pentecost Proper 28, Nov 18 2007 Yr B**  
**Isaiah 65:17-25: Canticle 9, 2Thessalonians 3:6-13, Luke 21:5-19**  
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*By your endurance, your steadfastness, you will gain your souls.*

John was fifty-seven years of age before his world began to crumble. His children had grown and now he was a grandfather of four boys and two girls. He finally had control of his own business and was beginning to expand into other communities. Hard work had paid off and he was frequently heard to say “thank God” when things went well for him, and to ask God’s help through good friends when things were tough. But nothing had prepared him for what came upon him.

John grew up in a good family, six brothers and four sisters and he was the middle child. He was not the greatest student but he did survive, completed college, married his childhood sweetheart, Ann Marie, and settled down to work. In twenty-eight years he had had three jobs and was now the owner/manager of his own company with a home on the lake and a small farm just to keep his hand in farming. John and his family were the pillars of the church and the community, respected, trusted, and considered the most solid families in the community

John’s religious life was sporadic after he went to college. However, with marriage and children he began a more regular religious life and as time went by took it increasingly more serious by going on men’s retreats, saying the daily office, and just recently he found a minister in a different denomination to be his spiritual director.

There was no doubt about it, from the financial and spiritual points of view, John had it made and was living on easy street. That is, until one of the grandchildren – his favorite and oldest grand daughter became ill. Her dad’s

employment necessitated his being away from home a lot and as a result, she had come to live with her grandparents temporarily.

No one knew exactly what happened to her but soon her temperature was spiking two or three nights a week; then she was losing weight. At first it was handled like any pending cold or flu. Then John and Mary Ann had her tested for drugs since one of her closest friends had been through treatment for alcohol and drug abuse. Doctor's visits were followed by Emergency room visits and specialists and after eight months they realized they were fighting a losing battle and she died.

John began to question what he had done wrong. He blamed himself for not seeing things earlier, even though there were no earlier symptoms. His daughter became angry with them and created a rift between John and his wife. In less than a year this loving family were in turmoil and no one seemed to know the chronology of it all. John and Ann Marie became separated, their daughter was not talking to either of them, and the brothers and sisters were split as they attempted to take sides and help.

Ann Marie began divorce proceedings that resulted in heated arguments over property, finances, and soon the company was on the verge of collapse. John described himself as a modern day Job from the Bible.

Consistently John's question to his spiritual director was "Why?" "Why now when everything is going so well?" "What did I do wrong?" He was accused of lying, of hiding profits, of having affairs. The rumor mill in his community was filled with insinuations. Increasingly John felt he was being left out in the cold not only from his family and friends but God seemed to be on vacation at times.

One thing did not change for John and that was he continued to pray the daily office. He found hope in Isaiah who said, *Surely it is God who saves me. I will trust him and not be afraid.* He believed the words of the psalmist who said, *The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God," all are corrupt and commit abominable acts, there is none who does any good.* Although there were days when he prayed the opening verse of psalm 13, *How long, O Lord? Will you forget me for ever? How long will you hide your face from me?*

John's spiritual director taught him about the Grief Process, the Process of Divorce and about the Process of Forgiveness. He helped him deal with his anger and offered him outlets to deal with it in a healthy manner.

After five years one would not recognize this once tight knit church and community committed family. It was as if they walked, surrounded by an invisible wall. Betrayed and lied about by family and friends, John's business was finally sold, the property sold and divided and the family were just as equally divided. They were like the Temple after the Romans were finished with it, not one stone was left upon another.

In the midst of all this John clung to his beliefs. He had looked at himself in ways that he had never considered before. He had taken what his counselor called "a fearless and moral inventory of himself" and discovered that, for all his goodness and love and prayers, there was a side to him that even he did not like.

Out of the rubble of a lost business and family and out of the rubble of his own self-examination, John began to rebuild his inner Temple. From a

financial point of view he was bankrupt and penniless and, living with a friend, also classified him as homeless. Deep inside this hurting spirit was the soul of one who had not lost his belief in God or in himself. Even his own spiritual director was astounded at his resilience.

John resisted calls for a geographical cure, to relocate and work elsewhere. He resisted those who advised him how to fight back at his family. He did what he considered to be right for all involved and in the process lost every thing he had worked for with the exception of God and his own sense of righteousness.

Slowly John's life began to come together again. Five years later he was in partnership in a totally different field of work with the family who befriended him and offered him shelter when he was bordering on homelessness. The grandchildren fought with their parents and eventually broke the thick ice wall that had developed among them but it was not as yet all melted.

A new life began, a new beginning with his family, but through it all there was never a need for a new relationship with God, despite the times when he considered God to be on vacation.

No one knows what the future will bring to them or how it will affect them mentally, emotionally, physically or spiritually. We may plan for the future but we cannot plan on the outcome. The best we can do is to be prepared regardless of what happens. As one minister said, "Even if I knew the world was coming to an end, I'd go trout fishing."

To live is to live one day at a time. To live is to be consciously aware of the presence of God within and around us, to talk and listen to God,

or, to pray and to meditate, and then to reach out and help others. To gain our soul, is to know at a conscious level what Jesus said in another context:

*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?*