

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
3 Easter Year B
April 19, 2015
By parishioner Gary Lewis

Good Morning and welcome ...it is my hope today to leave you with something to think about. I also promise to do my best not to put you to sleep. To that end as I begin my story I'm going to leave out the part about being raised in a log cabin, having to walk 10 miles to school and making my own cloths. I will however add a very important ingredient to my story and that is I was diagnosed with ADHD which is short for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder it's related to the more common ADD. Both are hereditary complex learning disabilities. Being diagnosed in April of 95' and requiring another 10 years to understand and learn to live with.... it remains a challenge to this day. Let me go back about 30 years ago when I thought I was the most worthless despicable person God ever created. I didn't tithe, in fact I wrote the book called "Reasons not to tithe for dummies" and if anyone here today is still looking for an excuse not to tithe, see me after church as I still have a few copies which I will gladly sell you at a discount. At that time in my life, I had experienced several broken marriages, had lost quite a few jobs and even spent a few days in jail. Still thought I had all the answers and knew what was best. Things began to slightly improve a bit after hearing the story over several years of the prodical son as I began to believe that just maybe I was loved by God after all and that perhaps one day everything would work out.

Fast forward to January 2014... I'm sitting at my kitchen table in tears having hit bottom once again realizing for the first time that no matter how much we think we know and how hard we try, we just can't do it by ourselves regardless of what our egos may tell us. We are only fooling ourselves if we think we can. I realized when you strip everything away and get down to the basics God asks three things of us.

First.... to TITHE...after all, everything that we have including our jobs comes from God so why not give so God's work can be done here on earth. Let me digress for just a moment as I said I wrote the book on reasons not to tithe some are.... I won't be able to pay my billsI won't be able to put food on the table..... I'll start when I return from vacation.... My car needs tires..... "NO MORE EXCUSES PEOPLE" When it comes to tithing we seem to develop an overwhelming fear that tends to envelope us and we either give God what is left over or nothing at all. Let me share something personal with you. My income now consists only of my SSI benefits which in my case are below the proverty line, so trust me: if I can do it anyone can do it.

Second..... to love and take care of our fellow man. We don't have to go out and find a cure for cancer, however we can donate our time... just a few hours a month at the local food bank or homeless shelter. We can mentor a child or help our neighbor in need. My favorite one is practicing random acts of kindness. They only take a second...don't cost anything and can

make a huge difference in one's life. Guaranteed to put a smile on one's face. I myself take communion to nursing homes for those without a church which I find very rewarding.

Third..... Don't worry....just give your worries to God and let him take care of them.. It was at that moment that I asked God to come into my life and to please take over admitting both my weakness and frailty. Afterwards for the first time in my life I realized that everything was OK after all. I have discovered that this journey that started almost two years ago is by far the greatest journey of my life. I have learned that it's not the destination that matters it's the journey itself.

I can't begin to tell you how my life has evolved and continues to do so every day. There are times I don't even recognize myself anymore.

And let me tell something really cool.....at first I thought it was just a flock of some kind, however I now realize every day is a perfect day even the days that I wake up and have some concerns that trouble me. Yet when it comes time to turn the lights out I'll look back and see it's been a perfect day after all and say thank you God.

Last year when I heard Bishop Baxter's sermon saying "God does not want you to worry" my first thought was O' boy am I in deep trouble. You may ask the question do I worry and my reply.....is the sky blue? Let me tell you I have worried all of my life about everything. In fact it would be easier to tell you what I haven't worried about and I assure you it's a very short list. I'm happy to say having God in my life I don't worry as much now and the good news it continues to be a work in progress.

As I look around this church I want to ask you a question.....how are your lives doing? Have any worries?... Is your job secure.....health doing good....family ok.....kids doing well in school... for those here today who can say everything is fine..... good for you and may God continue to bless you each and every day. However to those present today who may be facing uncertainty in their job or learning a loved one has cancer, the police show up on your door step to inform you that your child has been arrested for using drugs or 100 other things life can bring to you in a second.

I have learned on my journey that God will never abandon you nor give up on you. Trust me, God does not expect us to be perfect! Perhaps the next opportunity I have to speak to you I will share some of the really stupid and crazy things I have done over the years some of them more than once or twice. I'll tell you right now that it will take some time so I will be sure to allow for an intermission. I have found my journey to be both scary and wonderful at the same time and remember, you are never alone.

I ask you today to think about where God is in your life. I don't know about you....., but I have noticed that in today's world we have all kinds of gadgets that are supposed to simplify our lives you know keep us better organized and give us more time. I'm not so sure of that sometimes I think instead that we tend to worship our gadgets more than we do God..... for

instance, we stand in line overnight to get the latest “I-phone” or we are just going to die until we can down load the newest app you know the one that can tell you when you are going to win the lottery. I still believe in the tried and true KISS philosophy you know the KEEP IT SIMPLE STUPID one. Do we put God first in our lives or is it the I-PHONE 6 that comes first. In today’s Gospel Jesus’ told his disciples all people of every nation must be told in my name to turn to God in order to be forgiven. Where is God on your list? Is he number one or his down in 4th or 5th place behind the I-Phone and that trip to Europe that you have always wanted to take or is God even on your list? I invite you to take a look inside.....at your inner core you know the place I mean, the one that can make you a bit uncomfortable if you are honest with yourself.

When we ask God to come into our lives and take over it comes with both an obligation and a responsibility. However all it requires is to have the will in your heart to please God and he will take care of the rest. God gives us many gifts and many blessings each and every day the most precious gift is the gift of life. It doesn’t come from a bottle it doesn’t come from the latest app it comes from God and before we have that first cup of coffee we need to give thanks to God for that gift. Since my journey started I have discovered two other awesome and beautiful gifts from God they are the gift of hope the second is the opportunity given to us every day to grow and strengthen ones faith and all you have to do to begin your journey today is to ask.

I want to leave you today by sharing my favorite prayer with you. It is written by Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk.

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.