

IN NEED OF A GOOD RALLYING

--There is a tradition of sorts in churches that, when September rolls around, there is the need to schedule, as soon as is practical, a "Rally Day."

In my experience, a "Rally Day" has been associated with the formal start up of the Sunday School program in the Fall. After all, many aspects of our usual routines begin to slip as soon as the weather gets warmer in the Spring, and especially when the kids are out of school for three months. Lots of Sunday Schools in particular, feeling the uselessness of trying to continue their efforts over June, July, and August, simply altogether give up their programs over the summer--which therefore requires some means by which they can be re-started again in the Fall.

Apparently the process has worked like this for a pretty long time, and so churches-- clever and conniving entities that they are--have come up with this "Rally Day" thing. It is a not-so-subtle way of reminding people again of their more serious responsibilities and obligations, and of once more calling folks back to them.

--Now, in case you're wondering if you missed something along the way, today is not our "Rally Day" (with capital letters). Our Sunday School is still a few weeks away from being cranked up once again. Frankly, however, today--and every day--is a day which begs for a certain rallying as part of it.

You see, as unpleasant as it is to have to say (or to admit), we human beings are an easily distractible and pretty unambitious bunch of creatures.

Put us to work on a task, and in a short span of time you'll find us lying back in the grass, hands clasped behind our heads, gazing vacantly into space. Give us a focus, and in no time you'll find us attending to everything else under the sun except the one that we were originally presented with. Assign us a purpose and, no matter how noble or important it may be, after only a bit of serious application of effort and ability to it, you'll see our eyes unmistakably beginning to glaze over, as we slowly drift off the path and steer ourselves witlessly into some gully of weeds.

That is simply basic human nature and, to a greater or lesser degree, we all have a share in it. As a species, we just don't have enough development yet to recognize what is of the greatest value and then to stick with it over the long term to some positive conclusion. Instead, we allow ourselves easily to be carried away by a great assortment of undermining thoughts, irrational excuses, nonproductive behaviors, and bad habits.

While admittedly such things afflict us here, we might derive a bit of comfort from the fact that the problem is not specific to the church and to the church alone. Anyplace where you find a group of people coming together for a common purpose, you will find the twin phenomena of apathy and lethargy, and therefore the perpetual need for a timely rally.

That's why every high school and college has its pep rallies, where its athlete-warriors are encouraged and fans are enthusiastically engaged. That's why, whether Republican, Democrat, or Independent, there are the omnipresent political rallies, where platforms are formally adopted and candidates are finally endorsed. And that's why, wherever some social cause is stinging individual consciences, there will be public rallies, locally or nationally, by which to protest some policy or to impress legislators with a particular position to be taken.

In all such settings, the hope is that people will be influenced, activated, aroused; that, contrary to their basic human nature, they will be galvanized, energized, and moved to action. The successfulness of any rally is

judged in terms of its ability to stir people from their torpor and to motivate and concentrate their efforts in some specific direction. In short, whatever the group, if anything is to be accomplished, it is imperative that the base, from time to time, be rallied.

--That brings us back to us here, constituent parts of St. John's United Church of Christ. Given the general commission of the Church to a needy world, the stakes couldn't be higher. The longer we aimlessly slumber, the longer the world remains unhelped and unhealed. Where the Body of Christ in the world is concerned, being human cries out, constantly, for a concerted rallying--lest we forget who we are, what we are to be doing, and why we are to be doing it at all.

A good rally, then, is always in order for us believers, as the purposeful means by which we are roused from the slowing momentum of our unconsciousness, from our yawning inertia, to something characterized by greater urgency and energy and focus.

After all, the living, dynamic God is not in the business of laying people to rest, but of raising people to life. God, it is said, is not a God of the dead but the God of the living--or, to draw on the language of the Apostles' Creed, the God of "the quick." And you may have noticed already that the dead are not very quick.

In the end here, then, we may begin to see with greater clarity the whole point: For us as humans, to say nothing about for us as Christians, there is indeed the need periodically for a "rally day" (with lower case letters), because--given that distractible, unambitious human nature of ours--there is always a need for a good rallying on our parts. And September 2<sup>nd</sup> is not-too-soon to serve as a reminder of that pressing fact.

The thing is that, just as the story of Joshua's taking of the city of Jericho illustrates, whenever people rally, walls inevitably fall, and new territory is inevitably acquired.

--Recent heat and humidity notwithstanding, Autumn will soon be upon us. It's time again for a bit of disturbing and shaking awake. It's time once more for some stirring up and reactivating.

God, the highest voice within, calls us to nothing less. After all, if we are not numbered among "the quick," we most certainly will find ourselves among "the dead."

And we don't want that, now, do we?

Do we?