

WORSHIP ON
DEMAND

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Seventh Sunday After Easter

Pastor John Klawiter

Luke 24:44-53

May 29, 2022

Grace and peace to you my siblings in Christ,

A week ago, as we gathered for worship, we remembered Dylan Marshall, the 15 year old whose attitude was about living, even though his body was dying from cancer.

We learned a lot about his determination and grit through his life and death.

Then, a few days later, came the shocking and horrifying news out of Texas. These kids didn't have a chance.

We don't know them. They live far away from us. Yet, the fact it was in a school... shakes us to our core. As I've talked with teachers this week, the sadness has been overwhelming.

I've heard stories about active shooter drills. I can't even imagine.

Since I've been at Faith, we have held vigils. We've remembered innocent lives slaughtered in places like Parkland. Las Vegas. Orlando.

The world is a broken place full of hurt and people willing to bring about further destruction.

As the church, when we see the evil of the world, we call it out. We give voice to those who've lost their voice.

We do this by leaning into each other. We lean into our faith. We can't solve the problems of the world on our own.

One of the most significant ways that the church is able to make a difference is through relationships.

I often tell you stories about the Old Guys. This is our Men's Bible study that meets on Tuesday mornings at Keys Café in Forest Lake.

But did you know the origin of the Old Guys?

As I was watching the video about the Planting Hope campaign for this week, the **leadership of Alexis Oberdorfer (picture of Alexis)** reminded me of the creation of Old Guys.

Alexis's dad, **Don Oberdorfer, was one of the Old Guys at my last congregation.** Prince of Peace in Roseville.

Old Guys is not meant to be a demeaning term. It's a badge of belonging.

When I first arrived at PoP in 2012, I wanted to start a men's Bible Study. This would be a group that would function as a text study—talking about the upcoming Bible passage and thinking about how it applied to our lives today.

I also knew that if I called it a “men's Bible study”, it might not get the attention of many of the prospective attendees from the congregation.

One of those “Old Guys”, Jim, told me that he would have never come if it was just called “Men's Bible Study”—but something about being Old Guys was inviting and different.

That's for sure.

Prince of Peace hosted a monthly senior fellowship event called the OK's—short for Older Kids. It was a name bestowed long before I arrived at the church. The OK's would have a meal and program. The name was familiar to the congregation and didn't need much explanation.

So, when I wanted to put a new group on the calendar, a spin off of the Older Kids made a lot of sense—we would be... the Old Guys. The OG's were born.

It wasn't until I arrived at Faith that the need for a women's Bible Study was apparent... and no, I did not feel the need to keep the OG's theme going. Women of Wisdom, or WoW, was the wise choice.

The original OG's of PoP were an interesting group. There were guys with various faith backgrounds, education, military. There were Republicans and Democrats. There were guys with deeply held beliefs and some that really liked to rock the boat.

Don Oberdorfer did more than rock the boat, he tried to sink the ship.

Don was a former pastor when he lived in Baltimore. He told tales of justice work, especially with the needs in Baltimore and Washington, DC.

Eventually, he quit. He went into media relations. He wrote plays. But he stopped serving a church. He would admit that his own faith was very different than what he believed when he was ordained.

As he settled into Roseville, he attended church with his family every week. His daughter, Erin, also belonged with her three daughters.

For awhile, Don never came to Old Guys. Finally, one Sunday, we talked about that. I asked him why not.

“Oh Pastor, if I come, I'd be too out there. The rest of the guys would walk out.”

I suggested he might be too worried that he'd be attending a men's bible study. No, Don... this is Old Guys. We are on a journey together. He would be welcomed and his voice would be appreciated, no matter how “out there” his understanding of God.

“But Pastor, I'm like really really out there.”

But he came.

And yes, he was REALLY out there.... He would go off on some of the most incredible tangents and offer up the most thought-provoking questions. And every time he did, the more literal believers of the Bible in the group would listen and ask questions. They would learn from him.

Don would give space, give room to understand that his doubts about the Bible or his suspicions about the most miraculous stuff wasn't meant to take away the faith that the rest of the guys had.

Why did he keep speaking up? Because he trusted that his point of view would be heard and appreciated without threatening or persecuting anyone else's biblical perspective.

It was a truly healthy way of digging into the scripture—of being Old Guys.

Don helped debunk the myth that Bible study is about finding the right answer. He wasn't outside the box—he challenged the idea that we are even in a box.

He modeled that the clergy aren't the only ones who experience God and we can learn from each other.

Don helped teach me to be the leader I am to this day... when I left Prince of Peace, his family gave me his cross as a gift in memory of Don, who died the year before I came here while on vacation to St Petersburg, Russia.

Mark Allan Powell, author of *Loving Jesus*, writes **“Authentic Christianity is always a reality to be experienced, not just a collection of facts or doctrines to be learned and believed.”**

Old Guys, Women of Wisdom... but also book studies, refugee support, homeless ministry, design team, creation care, confirmation, Sunday School and Vacation Bible School, canoe trips, or the prayer chain, the list goes on.

This is a way for us to experience authentic Christianity—through relationships, through building trust, and to know that the facts and doctrines are important, but not if we are only collecting those facts and doctrines to beat others over the head with being right.

Authentic Christianity takes the doctrines and facts—like baptism or affirmation of baptism, and helps set that foundation. It gives us something to go off of and to be planted in.

It gives us something more to believe in when life doesn't go as planned.

We are rooted in our faith—that's why these metaphors of the Planting Hope campaign are so relevant to us—without being rooted and tending to our spiritual needs, we easily fall over. We don't trust God to take care of us because that is too scary. Too vulnerable.

The disciples have a long history of toppling over when the times get tough. We're in good company—so if we have had a hard time maintaining a faith routine over the last few years, we're not alone. It's ok. God is waiting.

Yet, on Ascension Day, it's as if the disciples have it all come together. And trust me, the story of Jesus ascending to heaven—that's REALLY out there! That's not the point. Again, this is a story of how Jesus equips us. He's taught them—they

learned the doctrine and beliefs over years of hearing him preach.

However, it's not until the resurrection when they get it. They're preparing, like white balloons on Ascension Day, to be sent into the world.

And now, as Jesus is about to ascend to heaven, the disciples have Jesus open up the scriptures to them. Jesus says "You are my witnesses... I am sending you what I promised. Wait, you'll be clothed with power from on high." What's he talking about?

The Advocate. The Holy Spirit. It will arrive on Pentecost. Next Sunday.

Then, he blesses them. And they respond with worship.

The ascension is a reality of faith to be experienced. Yes, it will later become doctrine, but that's not the point in the moment.

The moment is about experiencing the presence of God and then being witnesses to share it.

We don't have to be afraid. There's no such thing as dumb questions. There's no such thing as being "too out there." God is welcoming us into a life of experiential learning.

The lessons are never complete. Faith is an experience. We keep learning and applying that message with how we live for God in this world, knowing that someday, we are promised to join the Father in heaven, too.

But with our time on this earth, God has plans for us. Be authentic—help make this the world you want it to be. Amen.