

## **LIFE IS JUST A PENCIL**

**UU Community of Cambria**

**October 25, 10 am**

**Rev. Tom Norwood**

**It is good to be with you today, to share in community, and to renew old connections. The Kronos (chronological time) slips away no matter what we do, so it is important for us to be focused on the Kairos (sacred time).**

**As we grow older we often find ourselves bemoaning the loss of things and ways of doing. One of those losses for me is the use of the common pencil. There is something very satisfying about writing with a pencil that is somehow not duplicated on the computer, cell phone, or i-pod. Perhaps a contributing factor to this loss is how penmanship has dropped off the required list of classes taught.**

**So I want to share with you this morning my argument on behalf of the pencil. And I want to do it as a parable.**

**A pencil maker always took each pencil aside for a personal conversation before placing it into the box. He outlined for the pencil the five things it needed to know. The first of these was....YOU CAN DO GREAT THINGS, BUT ONLY IF YOU ARE HELD IN SOMEONE'S HAND.**

**Secondly, from time to time YOU WILL NEED SHARPENING, BUT YOU WILL BE A BETTER PENCIL BECAUSE OF IT.**

**Three, YOU ARE EQUIPPED TO CORRECT YOUR MISTAKES.**

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**A fourth thing to know is THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF YOU IS ALWAYS WHAT IS INSIDE.**

**And finally, ALWAYS LEAVE YOUR MARK. KEEP ON WRITING.**

Hopefully, by now, you realize I have substituted in my parable a pencil as symbolically US. So let us examine in more depth what it says to us.

**Our FIRST PENCIL PRINCIPLE we can accomplish much more together than on our own.**

Certainly there can be little argument that we need each other. No matter how many times we say, "I would rather do it myself", and how many times we protest, "It is quicker and easier if I just do it", the truth of the matter is that we need to share with one another for ultimate success. This is really difficult for those with quick minds and quick grasps of solutions. There is a natural tendency to be impatient with those who need to think things through with care. But the slower thinker often avoids costly mistakes the quicker one has overlooked.

We are who we are because we are a part of the community that raised us. We do not come into this world just knowing it all. We learn and grow by our exposure to those around us. This can be both good and bad. If we are fortunate to be a part of a very positive environment we will reap the benefits. However, our environment may be something to

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overcome. This, too, can be positive as we become stronger through adversity.

And this leads us to our **SECOND PENCIL PRINCIPLE**.

Life does not always treat us gently and kindly. Sometimes we endure particularly stressful and painful times. There are losses, illnesses, disappointments, even physical limitations. We must recognize these realities and learn to deal with them.

I have a limitation. I am short. Even my wife will tease me when I go out on an errand and tell her I will return shortly. Her response is, "well, you are leaving short, so I suppose you will return shortly." Hey, I can handle it. When I stumble, my fall is much shorter.

The times of stress and pain can actually be times of real growth and the gaining of new coping skills. We become better persons as life sharpens us up from time to time.

The process of sharpening leads us directly to our **THIRD PENCIL PRINCIPLE**.

We are equipped to deal with problems, and we can with some effort and skill, go back and correct many of our mistakes. Unlike the eraser on the tip of the pencil, we cannot eliminate past errors, but we can revisit them and seek to make amends. From our illnesses we learn to change our life styles and avoid that which can be harmful.

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This is also true of stressful situations. Just do not allow yourself to be in them again. Learn to avoid those situations that you cannot cope with. We, of all creatures, have the inner power to change directions.

This power to change directions comes from within our selves. And, you have rightly guessed, this is our **FOURTH PENCIL PRINCIPLE**.

The most important part of each of us is that which lies within. A pencil is not worth much without its lead. Within I am not a short person. I feel tall and do not shy from tall tasks. The true measure of every woman or man has absolutely nothing to do with the outward appearance.

Beauty is from within. Intelligence is from within. Humility, compassion, honesty, character, charity, love and hope all are from within. Our inward strengths guide our outer lives. And there is an unchanging quality about them.

Despite this, we often neglect the development of our inner selves and concentrate on our outer appearance. We are often obsessed with our weight, our hair color and style, the clothes we wear and how we wear them. We are prone to spending time on the passing parade to the neglect of the permanent.

It is from the important inner qualities that there emerges our **FIFTH PENCIL PRINCIPLE**.

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**Wherever you find yourself, whatever the circumstances, use your pencil to leave your mark. Give where you can give; sing where you can sing; be all that you can be. And never give up; always keep writing.**

**These PENCIL PRINCIPLES are not new, but perhaps in this parable form they may gain greater meaning for us. May we together be greater than the sum of our individuality.**

**Much of what I have been saying is captured in the words of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: "Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now."**

**AMEN & SO BE IT**