

Now before I tell you what he was talking about, I have to give you the backstory on all this, because it is essential.

Dutch's son, my cousin Jack, was a year and a half younger than me. His sister, Jill (yes- Jack and Jill), is a year older than my older brother (who is 15 months older than me.) Jack was always an adventurous kid; more adventurous than studious. He often got into trouble in school and was a bit of a 'mischief maker'. After High School graduation he went on to Vo-Tech school to be an electrician, which for whatever reason didn't work out so well. Then he began working for Purolater Courier, a trucking/shipping/delivery company.

But his true love was being part of the Volunteer Fire Department in Monroe County, at the Stroud Township station, just west of town.

By the early '80's he was getting his act together; had a good job, a steady girlfriend and was thinking about getting engaged.

In the winter of '83-'84 I was living in West Berlin, Germany- as a Volunteer Mission for the Church. I will always remember the phone call I got one early winter afternoon. It was my mother who said that Jack had been in a very bad traffic accident - a head on collision with another vehicle on Route 209 north (where all trucks have since been banned)- that the driver of the truck was OK but that Jack was in very bad shape at Pocono hospital; there were hundreds of people lined up to donate blood for him, but the doctors didn't know if they could keep him alive. I was beside myself. Hearing this call while I was thousands of miles away with absolutely nothing to do- but pray- was one of the worst feelings I've ever experienced.

I had to call back the next day to find out what had happened. Jack didn't make it. He died at 26, with his parents, sister and fiancé by his side.

So, on All Saints Day, I always remember Jack. I also remember what my Uncle Dutch said about "You Can't Take It With You."

At that summertime picnic, when Dutch mentioned that phrase, I asked something like- "What do you mean then, if it's not about money?" He said something like this: "Well I barely have enough money to rub two coins together anymore, but I know for sure what I'm not taking with me.... and it's all the pain that the world gives you. (He didn't really use the word 'pain'- but you might get the idea.) Dutch was undergoing cancer treatments at the

time, and his head was bald as a bowling ball. He never complained, once. He said that at least he could see the disease coming and had a chance to fight it, unlike Jack.

Dutch had grown to be at peace, along with my Aunt Jean, over years and years of tears and counseling with the local Methodist minister, Milton Hartenstine. Jack's fiancé had since married and had a child, a son, who she named Jack, with my Aunt and Uncle as godparents. Pretty touching.

What Dutch learned, the hard way, was that all the tears, anxiety and worry he could ever produce would not change what had happened, and that he had to let it go. God could and would take all pain he could ever endure, and more. God could be a recipient of grief; a repository of sorrow and a safe place for all his grief, worry and anxiety.

In some ways, Dutch and Jean lived themselves into the words Jesus shared, the hard way. They would agree with the wisdom shared in Matthew's gospel. Jesus' words are truer than we really know.

When Jesus spoke to this gathered assembly of followers, he was speaking to people living almost literally in a different world. "Serving God or wealth" (or mammon- in many Biblical translations), didn't so much mean having a penchant for buying luxury items as much as being sure to make contributions for the needy. Their financial concerns were not about retirement accounts, investments or interest rates; this was centuries before the invention of banking.

Some scholars say that the monetary reference that Jesus made was in part about the threat that Rome imposed the average Jewish peasant; that money was as important to pay tribute to Rome as it was to buy bread at the local market, and the graven image of Caesar was imprinted on those coins.

Luxuries were few and far between in ancient economies, far beyond the imaginations of those to whom Jesus was speaking, so what he was talking about was saving people from what you could call 'spiritual schizophrenia...' thinking that there was more than One God to believe in and follow. "Mammon" was a way of saying that there was another God with power, to whom we owe allegiance.

This is not so.

There is one God alone whom we worship and serve. Everything else in life flows from that.

So Jesus' words about worry and anxiety carry even more of a punch. Being asked to worship God alone is one thing, but to actually live that out is another. Being asked to let go of our anxiety, our pain, our doubts, all that the world brings to us, and to give that over to God- so that we have no worries, fears or anxiety sounds both totally unrealistic and a dream come true. Mostly, though, it seems totally unrealistic. Our pain is ours; we recognize it as part of who we are, whether we like it or not - and it then really needs to get pried away from us; coaxed by something or someone else.

Fittingly, this is where our new church Tag Line comes in... Seek.Share.Serve. And the example I have to illustrate this comes again from my Uncle Dutch and Aunt Jean. The experience of Jack's death shook them to the core, naturally. It took months and months; really years and years for them to ever think about setting foot in a church again after the funeral; though Rev. Hartenstine had coffee with them in their home most every week. (Really, it was about a six-year process, as far as I've counted.)

Oddly enough, the most therapeutic, helpful moment they had was to come back to church - and to serve as church greeters. Their service is what began to make a real difference in their lives.

Rev. Hartenstine pretty much forced them to do it, or so they said. Being Methodists, there was always a 'method' behind everything they did; and this was, he said, a necessary step in the right direction.

As greeters, Dutch and Jean both felt 'on stage', awkward, out of place, embarrassed, guilty and gradually, more at ease and more like they belonged there- welcoming people in Jesus' name- in the name of the One who welcomed them, as well. They both realized that is was better (though not at all easy), to 'let go and let God', as the saying goes, that it is not worth carrying the pain of loss around, and that greeting in Jesus' name, as simple as a task as it was- was really fulfilling. Just showing up to church made a huge difference in their lives, serving in that simple, but powerfully meaningful way; being part of it all, included in the life of the community week in and week out made all the difference in the world.

And so, when I was back in my hometown a month ago, gathered at the Methodist church with my stepdad for the recognition of those who have been members there for 50

years or more; we remembered all this, along with Aunt Jean, who has been a member there all her life long.

The body of Christ worked as it's made to; church worked. Slowly, steadily, over time, with patience, compassion and tender loving care, a family was a bit mended.

Not much is easy in this life, really, but God is good. God is faithful and God is always available (even when that seems farthest from the truth.)

So we gather on this Sunday, remembering both those we love and miss, giving thanks for the God who made us all and loves us through it all.

We gather as a church family of faith, aware of a love deeper, broader and more lasting than we ourselves alone; knowing that we are part of a larger family, generations and generations long, stretching from Jesus to forever.

We gather in faith, we gather in hope, we gather in love, called to live this way, in Jesus' name. Amen.