

by : Chaplain Jeff Bauer
5 February 1997

Supporting Scripture : II Corinthians 4:3-6
Scout Sunday, St. Paul's U. C. C. - 9 Feb. 1997

Today is Scout Sunday. Have you ever wondered why we celebrate Scout Sunday in our Church? I wonder, do they celebrate Scout Sunday in Churches where there aren't any Scouts? Probably not. Whether we had Scouts in our Church or not, the Cub Scouts, the Scouts, and the Girl Scouts would be very good organizations, but we are not here today to celebrate the organizations. No, we are here to celebrate you, the Scouts and the Leaders.

We celebrate today,, because of the choice that you have made, to commit yourselves to the principles of Scouting. By the wearing of the uniform, and in the pledges, oaths, and Scout laws that you have accepted, you have made a public declaration of you intention to live your life by the Scouting ethics. That's what you have done this morning in the presence of our Church, and you re-affirm this commitment at the beginning of each Pack or Troop meeting.

In Scouting we find that we can have a lot of fun while we are learning new skills. Summer Camp has always been a special time for me. How many of you have been to Summer Camp? Well I see that most of you Scouts have been there. One of the fun activities at camp is hiking. At camp, there are many miles of trails, which are all marked with trail markers. There are red trails, orange trails, blue trails, and many more. Using a map, you can find your way, from one part of the camp to another. The trails criss-cross over each other, so you have to keep an eye out for the trail markers to stay on the right trail.

When I was working at Beaver Day at our camp, part of my detail was to travel one of the trails at Camp Trexler, the red trail, and make sure that it was cleared. We cut down brush, and we marked any hazards, like fallen trees, on the map. When we returned, the Trail Master took our marked maps, and went back later with heavy equipment to remove the trees, so that the trails would be ready for the campers. Only the Trail Master could mark the trails, and he kept the maps up to date.

Today, I would like you to use your experiences at Summer Camp, as we talk about a hike that you all taking right now. You see, whether you are 6 or 60 years old, we are all on this trail. The hike that I am referring to is the hike of life.

Yes, life is a lot like a hike. In the beginning of this hike, there are many guides to help us. These guides are your Parents, Scoutmasters, Teachers, and Pastors. You see, they have already been on this part of the trail, and they can teach you many things. Oh, I forgot to mention the really fun part of this hike. There is no map. All you have to go on are the trail markers. But unlike the trails at Summer Camp, there are many types of trail markers here, and you must learn to recognize each of these to keep on course. Markers like trustworthiness, loyalty, duty to God, and many more. Sound familiar?

As you walk further along the hike of life, you soon realize that there are fewer and fewer Guides to help you. Unmarked paths that meet the trail, which previously were blocked by the Guides, are now open. Many times, you are tempted to try one of these side paths, but you remember what your Guides have taught you. You stay on the well marked trail. Sometimes there are no markers for a long time. You might begin to have doubts and fear that you may be lost; but then ahead, you finally see a familiar marker, and you thank the Trail Master. There are also fallen trees, storms, and other hazards on this trail, but the training from your Scout Leaders, and from the other Guides, helps you to keep going on the trail.

Now, up ahead, you see the well traveled trail veer off to the right, but as you look ahead, you see no markers. Off to the left, you see a small narrow path which leads to a hill, almost straight up. As you look up that hill, you see some of the familiar markers, and you say to your

self, iTrail Master, You've got to be kidding! As you think about what you will do, it seems easier to keep to the well traveled path, but there are those markers going right up that hill. You remember all the things that you learned on the trail, and the faith and trust that you have in the Trail Master, and so you finally start up that hill.

Even though you slip and fall back several times, you struggle up that hill and then, finally, you are on top. As you stop to rest and savor your victory, you notice that the trail ahead is straight and clear. It follows the crest of the mountain. As you sit there catching your breath, you can also look back and see the other path, the one that you didn't take. Although it started out wide and level, the valley path soon became overgrown with stickers and briar bushes and you watch as other hikers try to struggle through. Some of them look up and see you on your path and realize that they have made a mistake. They quickly turn back and retrace their path. Others are hardened by the path they have chosen and refuse to turn back. They even curse the Trail Master that they have disregarded.

You see, if we trust God, the Trail Master of our lives, and love him above everything else, we will keep Him at the center of our life's journey. And yes, sometimes our faith and trust in Him will mean that we will have to turn away from the well traveled path, the one that many people will choose, perhaps even some of our friends. We will remember that God loves all of us much more than we can imagine; we will see God's trail markers in our lives and choose to follow them. When we must, we will go up that hill. As we learned in this morning's New Testament Lesson, many who do not choose God's path will be blinded by the world's way that they have chosen to follow, but some will see the bright light of God's love in our hearts, (shining like a beacon in the darkness of our world), and they will turn back and find their way.

Our story about the hike this morning is a Parable. Jesus used parables to teach us about God. Many of Jesus's parables were about how we should dedicate our lives to God. Jesus didn't expect all of us to become Pastors or Monks in a monastery. That's not what He meant by dedicating our lives. Dedicating our lives to God means that we always will look for the path that leads to God, even if it is harder than other paths. When we work on our school work, we will do a job which will please God. When we have fun, we will choose to have fun which will bring glory to God. When we must make choices, we will ask ourselves, what would Jesus have done?

By thinking of God in everything that we do, we will find that keeping the promises that we make as Scouts is much easier. When we choose God's way, we will also be choosing those paths which are marked as trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent.

If we can center God in everything that we do,, every day,, then we will truly be able to say - all my studies, all my merit badges, all my accomplishments, my entire life - all of this is dedicated to the ONE I love, my Trail Master - my God.

Amen