

Spirit of Adventure January 3, 2010

Here we are at the very beginning of a new year, actually of a new decade. It's always a good time to both look back and look forward, reviewing what has been, and anticipating what is yet to be. As we look back, most of us probably can recall having some fantastic hopes and dreams for what our lives were to become. Maybe we dreamed of adventures in far-away lands, or maybe we dreamed of the homes we would live in, the families we might have, the careers we might pursue. Sometimes we thought of the successes we might achieve, or the recognition we might gain.

Seldom, however, do most of us dream about the disappointments we might experience, and yet those disappointments are part and parcel of life. We don't always achieve the goals we set for ourselves; we often feel more like failures than successes; our hopes for what life would be like seem more like fantasy than reality, and we find ourselves yearning for what might have been.

How can we reflect on our own lives—where we have been, and where we are now, and really take it all in—in spite of the unrealized dreams. How might we start today to live our lives the way God wants us to live? That's what we are going to be talking about this morning, and we're doing it by allowing a charming movie, *Up*, to lead the way.

This movie follows the life of a guy from his childhood dreams, through many of life's experiences, into his older years. I hope that as we share his journey, we'll reflect on our own, and see what we can learn from his life that sheds some light on ours.

Ellie is full of life and ready for the adventure. I'm taken with how convinced she is that nothing will hold her back from getting to her dream—living on the edge of Paradise Falls, but it's evident that she really doesn't have a clue how to go about getting there. She doesn't know how to turn her dream into reality.

In part, that's because she's young and naïve, and hasn't yet had to face some of the realities of life—realities that sometimes have a way of delaying our dreams, or even moving them outside the realm of possibility. And yet, as someone named Frank Richards said, **"All big things in this world are done by people who are naïve and have an idea that is obviously**

impossible." It seems to be human nature to hope for a life that's beyond our wildest expectations, because, after all, who are we without our dreams?

Our dreams are what energize us to action; they inspire us, and give us the courage to take steps that we might otherwise not take. That means that living toward our dreams might require us to take some risks, and that's scary for many of us. That's when we need to heed the words of Belva Davis, who said, **"Don't be afraid of the space between your dreams and reality. If you can dream it, you can make it so."** Dreams are the fodder of the future, if we live into them, if we act.

That can be risky business, but living life as God intends it to be lived does not come about by playing it safe. We have to be willing to take risks to make our dreams come true. I think that's part of what Jesus meant when he talked about having fullness of life. John's Gospel has Jesus saying it this way: **"I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness."**

That kind of life is lived by putting our trust in God and going for it! It means that we don't cower in fear; we don't hide under the covers; we stretch and grow and learn new things, try new things. We aim to experience all that life has in store for us, and that includes the times of incredible joy, as well as the times that we're in the depths of despair. To live life in all its fullness is giving it our all, putting our best selves out there, taking the high road, living true to our convictions, facing all the ups and down, always being faithful to God.

Isn't it amazing how life changes over the years? Mike and I recently celebrated another wedding anniversary, and we have this deal. We're married one year at a time, and the only time we can get out of our marriage is on our anniversary. So each year, we renegotiate our contract, deciding whether or not to go for another year. Frankly, some years have been better than others, as is the case with every relationship. In fact, I've sometimes said that Mike and I have had 30 good years of marriage, and that's not bad out of 40-some!

Sometimes on our anniversary, we have replayed the last year, and there have been times that we've tried to go back and recall the highlights of each year. Some of those times are easily noted—when we graduated from college, when our daughter arrived, when we moved from that house to this one, when a

parent died, when we took one trip or another, and so on. Life's events—both the joyful ones and the sad ones become marking points; they are like thresholds to the next era.

And with every era there are gains and losses, pluses and minuses. That's simply part of living, and the changes that come are inevitable. Things are far different now than they were when we were married, for example, and there's no reason to think that they won't be far different in another year, or five years, or 10 years or more.

We have to be ready to grow and change just as the world changes around us, if we want to live life fully. Otherwise we just become old fuddy-duddies, trying to hang on to that which used to be, refusing to accept the changes, and refusing to allow ourselves to change and evolve. Henri Bergson stated well what we need to do as the years pass. He said, "To exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly." That is the heart and soul of living the life God wants for us—growing, learning, exploring, evolving, changing, growing, evolving and changing some more.

Did you feel it? The excitement when Carl refused to sit down and die? When he took matters into his own hands and decided he was going for it? The energy, the joy, the thrill—they were all there, as he lifted off and headed for Paradise Falls, as he began living his dream.

To me, the message of this story is that we're never too old to live our dreams. George Burns put it like this: "You can't help getting older, but you don't have to get old," and to that I say "Amen!" We're never too old to head toward our Paradise Falls, never too old to give life our all. You see, we have a choice to make as we age, and for sure, we are all aging. The choice is this: we can live dying, or die living. It's as simple as that! We can stay stuck in the past, or we can choose to live each day as it comes to us. I believe God wants us to die living, to live each and every day to the very fullest.

There's a tombstone somewhere that reads: dead at 30, buried at 60. That's someone who quit living, who gave up, someone for whom life became boring and routine, and it's not someone who lived every single day to the fullest! That's what we're called to do. It doesn't matter what age or stage of life we're in, life is to be lived. Each of us has talents and abilities that can benefit the world, and make our corner a little brighter, if we choose to live that way.

Edith Wharton shared thoughts about living fully our whole life long when she said, "In spite of illness, in spite even of the archenemy sorrow, one can remain alive long past the usual date of disintegration if one is unafraid of change, insatiable in intellectual curiosity, interested in big things and happy in small ways."

I agree with her, and have found similar thoughts in a book I've mentioned before, *Aging Well*. That book documents the studies of two groups of men for some 50 years from their late teens into retirement years. The study found that those who were described as aging well were those who were "generative." That means that they were productive and continued to learn and add value to their own lives and to the lives of others. They shared their wisdom even while gaining more wisdom.

This word "generative" really resonates with me. As many of you know, I have received a "Clergy renewal leave grant" from Lilly Endowment that means I'll be away three months of this year. The purpose of my being away is to re-examine my life and to explore what it is that I will be able to contribute once my days of active ministry are over.

That time is still several years away, but it's something that life coaches say we have to think ahead about and plan for. How can we avoid just fading away, and instead keep vital and alive and interested and energized in order to live fully? That's what I'll be spending time thinking about, praying about and exploring. However, it's something we should all consider reflecting on, if we haven't done so. What does it mean to live life in all its fullness in our later years?

This segment of Carl's story is poignant for me, as he discovers that Ellie believed she was living her adventure the entire time. It was Carl who didn't seem to get it until after the fact, but it was a life-changing moment for him.

You see, the message as I take it is that to live life to its very fullest, we have to be present in every moment, in every experience of life. It doesn't involve hanging onto the past, or looking toward the future. It's all about now, this moment, this day. Not yesterday, not tomorrow, but today and today is here and now. We're living life fully when we drink in every moment, when we value, honor and appreciate the deepest joy, and allow ourselves to experience the far reaches of heartache. It's allowing every experience to sink into our being. That's when

we live, that's when we know the real spirit of adventure.

Closing

Maybe we can come closer to living as God would have us live, if we followed the words of this simple prayer, supplied by Mary Jean Iron: "Normal day, let me be aware of the treasure you are. Let me learn from you, love you, bless you before you depart. Let me not pass you by in quest of some rare and perfect tomorrow."

As we leave here this morning, I hope and pray that each one of us will live one day at a time, because that's all we have, and we will experience it to the very fullest. Best of all, God is in it and is with us all the way.

Have a good Sunday, and go in peace.
Amen.