

“Oh, Boy”

Sermon – February 2, 2025 Stone Presbyterian Church

Cold, dark, snowy. It was a Friday night, my very first campout with Boy Scouts. We were setting up our wall tents by flashlight and using bales of straw as insulators.

I had a cheap cotton rectangular sleeping bag with a scratchy wool blanket inside. I was so excited. I was 10-years-old, sleeping with two much older, more experienced scouts, David and Keith, who were like 11, maybe 12-years-old.

I slept soundly and woke up in the morning to utter silence. I went to go outside—and couldn’t. During the night it had sleeted and our tent was encased in ice. I thought it was so cool!

I woke up my tentmates. “The tent’s encased in ice!” I started pounding on the tent to break out. <excitedly> “Oh, boy!”, I said.

David and Keith were less than enthused and said, <complainingly> “Oh, boy.”

We got dressed, pounded our way out of the tent, got a fire going, cooked breakfast, and then had a day of competition activities with other troops.

For you see, this was no ordinary campout—it was Yukon Trail also known as the Klondike Derby where tens of troops from the area came to compete.

Troops are made of patrols and the patrols would compete by dragging a sled—like an Iditarod dog sled from station to station to perform different tasks, like lashings, map and compass, fire-building.

And my patrol of six of us performed—miserably. So bad that at the station for lunchtime we could not even start a fire. And so huddled on the side of wind-blown hill under gray skies we ate cold hot dogs right out of the

“Oh, Boy”

Sermon – February 2, 2025 Stone Presbyterian Church

package. The Boy Scout running that station just looked at us with utter pity, shook his head, and walked away.

The rest of the day went fine and the next morning on Sunday after we packed up, we had our own small ecumenical worship service, and drove home.

That was 55 years and 1 week ago—not that it sticks in my mind—back in my hometown of Dayton, Ohio where I grew up. It’s hard to say why that experience hooked me on scouts so that I went on to become an Eagle Scout and even a Scoutmaster. My father was a city boy. My family never went camping. I was (am) a bookwormish kind of guy.

The only thing in my background that suggested “Boy Scouts” was “Cub Scouts” to which I had belong and had enjoyed. But I was ready for the next level. And the real differentiator was camping. Mastering outdoor skills, experiencing the elements, and learning both to be self-reliant and to work with a team.

As successful troops say, “Scouting is outing.”

But the foundation of all it was purpose with principles as you heard in the Scout Oath embedded in our Call to Worship today and the Scout Law in our Prayer of Confession.

Fundamentally, the purpose is to build character.

The word “character” was first used in England around 1315 to describe a person’s “defining quality.” It is derived from the Greek root *kharakter*, meaning “engraved mark” or “engraving instrument,” originally from *kharax*, meaning “pointed stake.” Character, then, is forged as a set of distinct “stakes” that point to our true nature. The fires and pressures of life always show us who we really are. Good character produces morally grounded behavior with integrity—no matter what.

“Oh, Boy”

Sermon – February 2, 2025 Stone Presbyterian Church

The challenge can arise, though, when different interpretations of those principals causes conflict—something true of all human organizations and institutions.

Race, LGBTQ+, gender– Boy Scouts struggle with all of these issues, as has the church, as has society. And the struggles were as much internal as external and have caused splits as a result.

I didn’t think about these struggles in my youth so much because they didn’t affect me personally and I tended to take people as they were. I wasn’t “noble” in not discriminating; it just wasn’t on my radar.

Sadly, that is problem of many people today. “If it doesn’t affect me personally and directly, then I don’t care.” But you can’t be accepting of individuals different from you while tolerating discrimination against them as a whole, let alone endorsing it.

You can’t be allowed to go with flow of mob mentality when you know it is wrong. And you know it is wrong when it is hurting, not helping, other people; when is angry and hateful rather than empathetic and loving, when it is self-serving rather than serving others.

Today’s lectionary scripture passages are rich for this discussion and deserve far more discussion than we have time today unfortunately.

In the gospel lesson we hear Jesus’ proclaim his mission for the first time in Luke, which happens to be in his hometown.

He quotes the prophet Isaiah from the Hebrew bible, saying he is the fulfillment of that promise of deliverance. At first people are pleased, though surprised because they knew him growing up.

They quickly turn, though, when he announces, he isn’t going to do any miracles there. Jesus makes it clear that he will not be a prophet who

“Oh, Boy”

Sermon – February 2, 2025 Stone Presbyterian Church

serves the special interests of his hometown but rather is a messenger of good news for the whole world and especially the vulnerable.

The examples he cites are miracles the God sent Elijah and Elisha to perform—and not only were they to foreigners but to enemies of Israel.

Imagine how that message would be received if preached in Israel or Gaza today or frankly in the U.S.? It would likely spark the same rage and violent backlash as it did when at the National Prayer Service Bishop Budde simply appealed for mercy for the stranger, for the foreigner.

Jesus as a prophet (that is a speaker of God’s words), contends against popularity, pedigree, and provincial perspective. He doesn’t care about continuing to receive praise or that he didn’t come from an Ivy League seminary or to curry favor and make it us vs. “them.”

Jesus points to himself as the fulfillment of the prophecy and as the one able to offer salvation to all who hear him. Such salvation should be understood broadly as God’s redemptive work through Jesus with special attention given to those who are marginalized.

When we think about our own proclamation of the good news of Jesus, we might ask ourselves “Is our message good news for the poor? For the captive? For the oppressed? Does our proclamation envision that all can be saved?”

If our message is not as broad as Jesus’ message, then we must ask, “How can we proclaim the good news of Jesus so that it is good news for the very people whom Jesus pointed towards in his announcement of the gospel?”

Fortunately, most institutions, like Scouts and the church, evolved to be more inclusive. They didn’t change their values—they changed to better live up to their values.

“Oh, Boy”

Sermon – February 2, 2025 Stone Presbyterian Church

Validation lies in what we do, not how we begin. It lies in the lives we touch, the systems we change, the wounds we heal. It lies in our character.

Paul writes to the Corinthians who started off so well with good character but now fight among themselves, in part from seeing who is more holier-than-thou and because of social class conflict.

In today’s epistle lesson Paul describes how foundation of everything is *agápē*, the Greek word for the pure, selfless, and unconditional love for others. And to make it clear he uses all of chapter 13 to describe what that kind of love is and means.

For Paul, love is action verb, not a static noun. To love is to take concrete action. True love is not measured by how good it makes us feel as individuals. The true measure of love is its capacity for tension and disagreement without division in the community.

We can love because God has already fully known us and loved us anyway, and is working to make our lives and our communities, our country, our world look more and more like this busy, active, tireless love.

To pursue love is to bring good news to the poor, to look for ways to bring freedom to those in bondage, to announce God's acceptance of the undeserving, unwelcomed, and unexpected.

When we are truly a community in Christ, a community that knows its unity and celebrates its diversity, a community that knows the reality of division, and yet has in view the cross that binds us together, we will be able to join Jesus in Nazareth and walk along him in his ministry to those who so desperately need to hear his love for them, including us.

So when we look around instead of saying, <despondently> “Oh, boy”, we let the Spirit of the Lord fill us and say, <exuberantly> “Oh, boy!”