

Greetings to all those who have been born again as well as to those who haven't been,

SCRIPTURE:

Jeremiah 1:5 (MSG) – Larger reading: Jeremiah 1:4-16

“Before I shaped you in the womb, I knew all about you. Before you saw the light of day, I had holy plans for you: A prophet to the nations— that’s what I had in mind for you.”

STORY:

When a small child lost her birth certificate, she cried to the teacher: “I’ve lost my excuse for being born.”

OBSERVATION:

Birthdays come and birthdays go. As a general rule, they are just another day within the course of one’s life. Nothing special. Nothing unique. Just another day on the calendar. Right?

Oh, there are certain birthdays that are probably more special than others, such as turning 13 – finally a teenager; 16 – finally can drive (if your parents approve and will pay for the insurance); 21 – finally classified as an adult. But birthdays come and birthdays go ... one day after another ... just another day on the calendar. Right?

There are a few birthdays that I do remember. Not mine, but those celebrated by others.

At the Hudson church we took the time to recognize birthdays during worship. Audrey was a unique individual. She wasn't bashful about her age so I knew that I was on safe ground to ask her how old she was. Audrey declared with a proud and strong voice that she was 65. “What is so special about being 65?” I asked. “Well,” she responded, “you can eat anything you want because at 65 they don't refer to you as fat, but as maturely and I plan on being very maturely!” The congregation laughed. Audrey was fun to be around.

Then you have my youngest daughter Erin. She was but a toddler when someone asked her when she was going to be four. Evidently she had been asked that particular question once too often because this time her response to her uncle was, “When I get done being 3!” Today, she starts to remind everyone in July that August is her birth month ... and she likes to draw out the celebration for the entire month. She too is fun to be around.

The only thing that I like better than surprises is pulling off a surprise. My spouse of 55 years is a little hard to surprise, as is my oldest daughter. They just think too much and try to jump ahead to figure everything out. In that way, they are not necessarily fun. But one year, when Margaret was going to turn 60, I was able to pull off a surprise birthday party with 150 of her family and friends. She said later that she was a little

suspicious, but I really don't think that she was. She was in her "element" as she moved through the fellowship hall greeting everybody; remembering times past; basking in the love and joy of the moment. I have to admit that I was greatly relieved when that day was finally over. I was also thankful for everybody that pitched in to make it happen, especially those who drove great distances to be present for the celebration.

For Tracy we tried to pull off a surprise birthday party when she turned 16. The family took her to dinner so that our church's youth coordinator could come to our house with the youth from church and high school band to decorate and get ready for our return. I whispered to the hostess at the restaurant that this was our daughter's birthday, but we had a number of people coming to our house for a surprise party and so we were looking at trying to get in and out as quickly as possible. Well, the waiters did come to our table after the meal and started to sing the Happy Birthday song ... one and half notes flat ... to a musician. It was a painful memory, but the party at the house was more joyous. It was fun.

For the last many years I've added a little twist to this whole "how old are you" that takes place during birthday celebration by declaring what anniversary it is of my 39th birthday. This year it will be my 39th anniversary of my 39th birthday. People usually stop in their racks and cannot do the math quick enough to figure it out. But, as the proverbial response goes, you are as old as you feel! I don't feel my age, usually, and it always surprises me when I look in the mirror and discover this old man looking back. Surely that isn't me! Most of the time I think of myself as 39! ... You can stop laughing now!

Taking the time to celebrate your birthday is important because it affirms the day that God gave the world a very special person ... YOU! You are the most unique person that God has ever created. Through you God said, "Let hope reign supreme once again." In you God acknowledges that love is possible and grace is a reality. On your special day find some people to hug and if you need to, just stand there and hug yourself. It's okay! Acknowledging your birthday is a God given right to be affirmed. To recognize that you are "somebody because God don't make junk!" So, on your birthday declare to the world that you have arrived. You deserve to be here.

And if it isn't your birthday ... then celebrate your unbirthday. I love Walt Disney's "Alice in Wonderland". There is the unbirthday song. The lyrics to that song are:

A very merry unbirthday ... To me ... To who? ... To me Oh, you

A very merry unbirthday ... To you ... Who, me? ... To you Oh, me

Let's all congratulate us with another cup of tea ... A very merry unbirthday to you

Now statistics prove ... Prove that you've one birthday ... Imagine just one birthday every year ... Ah, but there are 364 unbirthdays ... Precisely why we're gathered here to cheer

*A very merry unbirthday ... To me? ... To you
A very merry unbirthday ... For me? ... For you
Now blow the candle out, my dear ... And make your wish come true
A very merry unbirthday to you*

Therefore, if it is your birthday or if it is your unbirthday ... celebrate the life that you have been given ... it is a precious gift from God ... therefore, rejoice and be glad in it for you have arrived ... let the celebration begin!

QUOTE:

“And in the end, it’s not the years in your life that count. It’s the life in your years.”
- Abraham Lincoln

PRAYER:

Help us Dear Lord, never to take any of our days on planet earth for granted. Each day is precious in your sight, as we are. Help us to truly come alive as long as we live. In the name of our living Lord. Amen.

And the faith journey continues, Pastor Jim
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This Sunday we finish up our sermon series “From Slavery to the Promise Land” as we look at the idea of Cities of Refuge from Joshua 20. We will have in-person worship in the sanctuary. Service will start at 10:30 and we will be following all of the guidelines for safe gathering of more than just a few people. Then the first Sunday of November we will start a new 4-part sermon series titled: “From Servant to Saint”.