

October 21, 2011

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

Don't live somebody else's life. When someone is as successful as Steve Jobs (Jobs, the founder and CEO of Apple, died last week at the age of 56 from pancreatic cancer), there is interest in gaining insight into their mind and spirit. Jobs unveiled glimpses of himself in a commencement speech he gave to the graduating class at Stanford University in Palo Alto, CA in 2005.

Actually, my first church out of seminary was in Palo Alto back in the late seventies where, although I never met Steve Jobs, I remember hearing about him. These were the early years when he and friend, Steve Wozniak began developing the first Apple computer. Within ten years, Apple evolved into a two billion dollar corporation with 4,000 employees.

Years later, in 2004, Jobs was diagnosed with a serious form of pancreatic cancer, an event which led to probing insights on death and the meaning and purpose of life.

In his address to the graduating seniors that day, Jobs said: *Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life.* Going on, he commented how *everything—all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment of failure—these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important.*

Moving on with this thinking, he observed: *Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life.*

Certainly, this is excellent advice for any university graduating class, but it is also wise and inspirational counsel for us.

It is so important in life to find out who we are and, therein, to have the courage to be our self. *Being our self*, of course, requires that we find out what we love—what is our passion. This discovery is one of the most important uncoverings in life for any of us. To varying extents, it takes time, effort, focus and commitment. It also requires that we trust our heart and intuition.

Don't settle! And as Jobs advised in his commencement address, *if you haven't found it, keep looking; and don't settle.*

The consequences of *settling* in life are all about us. It is the lawyer who *settled* in with the large law firm and never got around to practicing the refugee-advocacy work she had dreamed of doing during her early days of law school. It's the young, successful corporate executive who really wanted to teach high school history and coach football. It is any of us who *settles* for something less than what our heart and intuition call us to.

When we *settle*, we live a life of *what ifs*. *What if* I'd followed my heart and not worried so much about income and status? *What if* I'd pushed on to grad school, gotten the degree I always wanted and simply trusted that things would work out? *What if*?

In his commencement address, Job sounds a chord in Ecclesiastes, a wisdom book—right after Proverbs—in the Old Testament of the Bible. He says,

Death is very likely the single best invention of life. It is life's change agent. It clears out the old to make way for the new. Don't let the noise of other's opinions drown out your own inner voice.

The courage to be. It takes courage to be the person our heart and intuition keep telling us we are. Courage, because it's not always the easy road to go down. Courage, because it's hard not to doubt yourself when other people keep wrapping you in their dogma and truth.

And yet, there are great benefits from pursuing the courageous path. They're called *inner peace* and a *calming* in the spirit. There is the palpable sense in life that the greatest thing we can do in our human journey is to live an authentic life.

What Jobs' very human speech reminds us is that we really don't have much time in this life. Life is amazingly fleeting; it doesn't wait for any of us. And to a great extent, our lives are about awareness and boldness. Awareness of who we are, where we are and what time it is; and the boldness to stay the course, to fight the fight and to never give in to the forces of mediocrity that are forever trying to pull us down to their level.