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**SUNDAY, JUNE 20, 2010**  
**THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
**Luke 8:26-39 (The spiritual fountain of youth)**

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**TODAY'S SERMON THEME:**

We live in an age where almost all of the products being advertised -- on radio, TV, the Internet -- claim to help us grow old "gracefully." From plastic surgeons to diet consultants, from vitamin salesmen to exercise experts, from wrinkle creams to stamina pills, we are bombarded by offers to help us stay young. But if we really want to find the fountain of youth, we had better start with our spiritual lives FIRST. Otherwise we're just wasting precious time.

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**1. I once had the great privilege of meeting -- and ministering to -- a woman who lived in three centuries. THREE centuries: The 19th Century, the 20th Century, and the 21st Century. It is a safe bet that I will never meet another person who can make that claim. Everyone called her Nana; she was the grandmother of one of our parishioners -- born in 1898 and died in 2002, at the age of 103.** Until the day she died, she was mentally alert, extremely talkative . . . and funny. It's the "funny" part I want to look at this morning. **But first let me tell you about the day I gave Nana "last rites."** I was in my office one afternoon when a family member called to ask me to come quickly to the nursing home. Nana had slipped out of consciousness, and they wanted me to give her last rites. I rushed to her room and led the family in the short service known as "ministration at the time of death." After the closing blessing, a granddaughter leaned down to Nana, and whispered in her ear: "Nana, are you ready to go see Jesus?" Suddenly, dramatically, Nana opened her eyes, got an impish look on her face and replied, "NO!" She laughed and chuckled for another six months before she finally went "to see Jesus."

**2. A couple of questions seem to pop into my mind from time to time.**

**(1) First, why do some people remain youthful even when they grow old?**

**(2) And what can we learn from these "elderly" youngsters?**

**Let's start with the Old Testament.** In one of the most analyzed stories in history, Moses lived to be 120 years old -- the first 40 years of his life as an Egyptian prince, the second 40 years as a sheep-herder in Midian, and the last 40 years as the Deliverer of his people. But we are told very specifically that Moses did not "age" the way most people age. Right up to the very end of his life "his eyes did not grow weak and his natural force (his strength) was not diminished." That is from Deuteronomy 34:7.

WHAT IS THAT ALL ABOUT? What keeps a person young even when he or she is old?

**Up until a few months ago, all we had to go on were the individual stories told by people who actually made it to their 100th birthdays.** I have

known several people who lived that long -- including our own Warner McNair, who passed away last year at the youthful age of 100. Warner and his brother Jack, who died earlier this year at the age of 97, were both young at heart. They sang in Gethsemane's choir for close to 70 years, and sang with the Fargo Barbershop Choir for more than 60 years. **So from their stories alone, we know that MUSIC must have something to do with youthfulness.**

But there must be more. As a newspaper reporter in the mid-1970's, I interviewed a man on his 100th birthday . . . and he was one of the most delightful people I ever met. He was always telling jokes and laughing. He always had a twinkle in his eyes and a smile on his lips. And when I asked him if he had thought about how he wanted to die, he responded immediately: "Yep. I know exactly how I want to die. I want to be shot." I shook my head in disbelief and asked a follow-up question: "Who do you want to shoot you?" He replied: "I want to be shot by the jealous husband of a 30-year-old woman." Other 100-year-olds that I have known also seemed to have a mischievous streak. **So maybe a SENSE OF HUMOR is also important in staying young at heart, along with MUSIC.**

**3. In fact, BOTH MUSIC and HUMOR ARE INDEED NECESSARY for staying young at heart. And that's not just my opinion. At long last, scientific evidence now shows us exactly what it takes to stay young. To remain youthful through the aging process. And it probably should not surprise us to find out that MUSIC and HUMOR are part of the secret to longevity.** A new book published by *National Geographic* in Washington DC has the full story.

The book is called **The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer from the People Who've Lived the Longest**, and it's written by Dan Buettner. In an extraordinary journey to find answers to youthful living, Buettner led a team of health professionals and scientists to FOUR SPECIFIC AREAS OF THE WORLD where people live the longest -- the four "blue zones." The team of scientists interviewed centenarians and looked closely at their lifestyles, diets, exercise and physical and mental habits.

**The four blue zones are: (1) The Barbagia region in the central part of the Italian island of Sardinia; (2) The nation of Okinawa; (3) Loma Linda, CA (the Seventh Day Adventist population); and, (4) the Nicoya Peninsula in Costa Rica.** Do those regions shock you? They should. But they are the four areas with the highest percentage of people over the age of 100. Here are some of the things the National Geographic study found out:

(1) Nearly all of the centenarians in all four regions had avoided the diseases that kill off most of the younger people in the U.S. and other "western" nations: Cancer, heart disease, diabetes, Alzheimer's, and dementia.

(2) Centenarians in all four regions shared common lifestyles, attitudes toward life, and daily habits that contributed to their health and longevity.

(3) Centenarians in all four regions, without exception, had a cheerful attitude and a sense of humor . . . and a spiritual FAITH.

(4) They were all gardeners -- eating plant-based food: Fresh vegetables and fruit, whole grains, beans, nuts, sweet potatoes . . . also fish, olive oil, honey

. . . ate meat only about once a week . . . and drank "artery scrubbing" red wine.

(5) Hugging and kissing were priorities . . . as were jokes, story-telling, parties, worship, walking, gardening, laughing, and smiling.

(6) They were all "relentlessly optimistic," in the words of the study, and had a propensity for partying, taking daily siestas, and walking everywhere.

(7) They also had caring relationships -- and close contact -- with their extended families. In fact, the family relationships gave them a sense of purpose for their lives . . . and they always respected their elders.

(8) And perhaps the most shocking thing: The researchers found ALL of these qualities -- these "life-affirming, youthful behaviors and attitudes" -- in the United States. NOT IN THE MODERN DAY UNITED STATES, THOUGH . . . They found all of these characteristics in the United States of the 18th Century -- the mid-1700's. The U.S. was a "BLUE ZONE" 250 years ago.

#### **4. The main point I want to make today is this:**

We live in an age where almost all of the products being advertised -- on radio, TV, the Internet -- claim to help us grow old "gracefully." From plastic surgeons to diet consultants, from vitamin salesmen to exercise experts, from wrinkle creams to stamina pills, we are bombarded by offers to help us stay young. But if we really want to find the fountain of youth, we had better start with our spiritual lives FIRST. Otherwise we're just wasting precious time.

#### **5. In Luke Chapter 8, the Lord Jesus and His apostles are traveling from city to city in Galilee (Northern Israel), teaching, preaching, and healing.**

Large crowds were following them, bringing the sick and infirm, the confused and the possessed, the frightened and the lonely. All wanted a special touch from the Lord. All wanted a word of hope. All wanted assistance. All wanted purpose and direction for their lives. Already in Chapter 8, Jesus had calmed a storm on the Sea of Galilee -- speaking a word of peace (SHALOM!) into the midst of chaos; and He had announced that LIGHT had come into the world, divine LIGHT that shatters darkness of mind, body, and spirit. And then the disciples and Jesus journey to the opposite side of the sea, to the region of Gerasa. Here they encounter a violent man possessed by a LEGION of demons:

**(1) This man was tormented by darkness (demonic darkness).**

**(2) He lived among the tombs, among the dead (utter hopelessness).**

**(3) He attacked others, frightened others, shouted and howled.**

**(4) He was the perfect example of a person totally DEVOID of HOPE:**

**As good as dead, physically, mentally, spiritually.**

**(5) But then he encounters the Lord Jesus -- who cast out the legion of demons (6,000) into a herd of swine.** Jesus restored him to health -- body, mind, and spirit -- from the "inside, out." Jesus gave his life purpose -- to spread the Good News of what God had done for him. Jesus had given him a spiritual basis for living . . . which the Lord also offers to all of us. His life was made NEW.

**Our lives can also be made new. With the MERCY, JOY and HOPE of the Lord. These are the keys to life. To remaining young at heart. For those who are truly interested, these spiritual gifts are the true fountain of youth.**