

BUT WAIT! THERE'S MORE!

Sermon, November 6, 2016

Texts: Hagai 1:13 – 2:9; Luke 20:27-38, II Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17

"BUT WAIT! THERE'S MORE!" That was the signature "pitch" phrase coined by Arthur Schiff, who died August 24, 2006 at the age of 66. Now, you may not recognize that name, but many of you might recognize his voice. Arthur Schiff had a hand (*and quite often, a voice!*) in producing nearly two thousand television infomercials during his three year stint right here in Warwick, Rhode Island, with a company called Dial Media located not far from here ... go down the street, turn left on Bald Hill Avenue, and head about two miles, right next to the Kent County Courthouse. Dial Media was founded in 1975 by Ed Valenti and Barry Becher; the company is considered to be the founder of the infomercial. "Buy now!" Arthur Schiff's voice would intone. He would go on to describe all of the product's amazing virtues, then would use that signature phrase of his: "BUT WAIT! THERE'S MORE!" Then he would throw in one more amazing bonus product to sweeten the deal. "ACT NOW and you'll also receive (name of additional product here) ... and all for just \$9.95." Schiff also coined other widely used (*and often parodied*) phrases used in infomercials to this day, such as "Isn't that amazing?" and perhaps my favorite, "Isn't that a Clever Cleaver!"¹

When Arthur Schiff was assigned by Valenti and Becher to advertise a set of knives with the name of Quickcut Knives, he dreamed up a new name for the product, "Ginsu." It was a made-up word; there is no "Ginsu" in the Japanese language. The knives had absolutely nothing to do with Japan; they were actually made in Fremont, Ohio. But somehow the association in the mind of the prospective buyer with a Japanese Samurai sword in the kitchen gave these knives an image that made them a cut above regular knives (*pun intended*). Does anybody remember that 1978 infomercial?² A Japanese man (*who was a local exchange student, I think from Brown*) in a karate uniform is poised over a couple of 2X4 boards, and Arthur's voice intones, "In Japan, the hand can be used like a knife," and the karate master would "slice" through the (*pre-cracked*) boards, breaking them with his hand. The Voice would then say, "But this method doesn't work with a tomato." The next scene would have the hand come down on a tomato, splattering it all over the table. The Japanese chef would then come on and show all the amazing qualities of the Ginsu knives, making paper thin slices of tomatoes, bread, onions and even slicing through cans and chopping wood ... and every knife came with a fifty year guarantee! Well, in the next five years just under three million sets of Ginsu knives were sold ... and eventually went on to rack up more than \$30 million in sales by the time Ginsu was acquired by Warren Buffett in 1985. Again, the name Ginsu doesn't mean anything in any language, though Barry Becher liked to say Ginsu means, "We never have to work again!"³



BUT WAIT! THERE'S MORE! Dial Media was located at 1775 Bald Hill Road, at the intersection of a then-unnamed extension road connecting Quaker Lane and Bald Hill Road behind the Kent County courthouse. At a ceremony April 3, 2009, that extension road was named Ginsu Way; State Representative David Caprio had sponsored the legislation to honor the Warwick company that turned a simple little knife into an infomercial icon. (Pictured is Ed Valenti with a Ginsu knife under that street sign ... you can see this sign by just heading south on Bald Hill Road toward I-95; Ginsu Way is at the traffic light just past the La-Z-Boy and Ethan Allen stores on your right, before the Kent County Courthouse parking garage.)

You know, I can't help but wonder ... when Arthur Schiff departed this life August 24, 2006, I wonder if he heard a divine Voice calling, "BUT WAIT! THERE'S MORE!" Because there certainly IS more to life than just this existence on earth! The Sadducees would not agree, however. They might have said, "Don't wait. There isn't any more. When you're dead, you're dead. That's it."

As we are told in today's reading, the Sadducees did not believe in life beyond the grave. They were convinced the afterlife is nowhere mentioned in any of the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch, which was their sole scriptural authority. As I've mentioned before when we've looked at this passage, that's why they are called Sadducees ... they had no hope in life after death, so they were Sad, you see. Trying to trip Jesus up, they pose this rather absurd question to Him. You know the story ... this woman marries, her husband dies; she marries his brother, he dies; she marries another brother, he dies and so on through all seven of the brothers ... instead of seven brides for seven brothers (*a musical that came out the year I was born!*), we have one bride for seven brothers. My first thought is, "Men, stay away from that woman!" Seven times a widow! But that's beside the point ... what the Sadducees want to know, at least

¹ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Schiff

² The original Ginsu commercial: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXC5k9cayG8>

³ See Washington Post obituary for Mr. Schiffer: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/01/AR2006090101777.html>

theoretically, is, "Whose wife will she be in heaven?" Jesus answers their question in a way that I'll have to save for some other sermon, but He then goes on to use this opportunity as a teaching moment. He uses this opportunity to affirm the reality of life beyond the grave by citing an authority the Sadducees will accept ... an account from Exodus, one of the five books of Moses, about the Lord's appearance to Moses in the burning bush. In that encounter God said, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Present tense. Not, "I was the God of Abraham when he was alive," but "I am the God of Abraham." Jesus is inferring, "You Sadducees think this life is all there is, BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE! Abraham and Isaac and Jacob are very much alive and in God's immediate presence. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living!" Now, hold that thought for a moment.

In our lectionary text from the Old Testament, the people had been back from the Babylonian exile, now, about eighteen years. (I provided a little background prior to the reading of the text: When Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonian armies in 586 BC during the time of Jeremiah, the magnificent holy temple in Jerusalem built by Solomon that had stood nearly four centuries was leveled, and they were carried off into captivity. For nearly two generations, they lived as captives in Babylon, then Babylon fell to Persia. King Darius of the Persians let the Hebrews return to their devastated homeland, and even offered to help finance the rebuilding of the temple.) Zerubbabel and Joshua began organizing the daunting work of rebuilding the destroyed Temple. As we read in chapter 2; v. 3, God says: "Ask the people, 'Who of you is left who saw this Temple in its former glory?' How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?" Those few who did remember the original Temple built by Solomon had to be well into their seventies and eighties by now, and they had to know there was no way they could match the old Temple ... they didn't have the rich extravagances of Solomon, with his professional craftsmen, the imported woods and huge quantities of gold. Also, that was another time, another era, a time when the nation was strong, prosperous, and the vast majority of the people were fervently faithful and eager to honor God. Now, the nation is devastated; they are few, relatively poor and with limited resources. How discouraging it must have been for those who remembered the glory days. How daunting the rebuilding task appeared. Yes, to them, the Temple would never be the same again.

To slightly paraphrase, imagine God saying through the prophet, "Ahh, so you remember what this Temple was like before. You may long for how things used to be. You may be thinking it will never be the same again. BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE! It won't ever be the same again. It will be DIFFERENT. In fact, one day the glory of the new Temple will far surpass that of the old. Don't be discouraged! Stop spending time and energy remembering the glory days, stop with the lamenting and go to work!" A quick aside: that Temple imagery is a prophecy of the New Temple to come in Jesus Christ, one made up of "living stones," a Temple that will extend throughout the world, a "place" in which God's Spirit dwells, with Christ as the cornerstone. The body of Christ ... the church ... is that Temple in which God's Spirit dwells and fills the whole world, bringing the good news of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ. You and I are living stones in that temple of God. But that's almost another sermon.

Three times God says in verse 4 ... "Be strong ... be strong ... be strong ... and then He says, "Go to work! FOR I AM WITH YOU." There it is. There's the promise. There's the hope. "FOR I AM WITH YOU." Yes, there's the far off promise of a greater Temple to come, but the immediate promise ... that's what the people need to hear. They need to hear, "Do not let the great disappointments and ruins of life distract you from the greater promises of God. Do not let the pains, the hardships, the losses cause you to forget God stands beside you to bring you through! Do not let nostalgic yearning for some glorious past discourage you and sap your energy for the present; GO TO WORK in the midst of how it is, with what you got, in the time you have and work hard to make good memories and a solid religious heritage for those who do not have the wonderful memories and opportunities you may have had. Yes, the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises may be on a far distant horizon. And yes, there may be a long time between here and now and then and there. But the living God of Abraham, Jacob and Isaac promises, 'I AM WITH YOU NOW.' So, go to work! For your own good and for the good of those you love!"

Essentially, this is also Paul's message to the struggling young church in Thessalonica. We can only look at this briefly, but the particular challenge for that young church was that some were teaching Jesus had already come back and that the Thessalonians had somehow missed out, they got "left behind." That meant for them all the hardships they were experiencing, including the persecutions they were enduring, was simply the way it was and would ever after be. "Do not be shaken or alarmed," writes Paul. "The Lord *hasn't* returned yet." He goes on to say in so many words, "BUT WAIT! THERE'S MORE!" "The day of the Lord *is* coming, and the rebellious and lawless one behind all of this is destined for destruction on that day. That day will come. Yes, come, Lord Jesus! But don't forget ... Jesus is already here! By His Spirit He is with you and at work in you to make you His faithful people. You will share in His Glory, now and forever!" Paul reminds the Thessalonians, and us: Jesus is with us in this life, and there is *more* to life than this life, so stand firm. Yes, Jesus is coming, but don't forget ... He's also already here. So, let's be strong, be strong, be strong ... and get to work! For God is with us! Now!

BUT WAIT ... THERE'S MORE! The best is yet to come!