

Sermon 021217 Boy Scouts
Scripture
Sermon Title Be Prepared

I am honored to be part of the kickoff of the 50th Anniversary year of Troop 29. The founding father of Troop 29 was Bill Scott. His son, Thomas Everett Scott, an actor of acclaim, is one of some 40 Eagle Scouts that came through Troop 29. Other founding fathers that have passed were Bunky Fanning, Kenny Elder, and Bob Johnson. Current church members that have been involved in Cub and Boy Scouts are the Augustsons, the Martins, the Driscolls, the Repetas, and the Wilburns. I'd like to also recognize Mike Ellis and Frank Roy and all their efforts for Scouts including the Venturing Crew, which celebrates its 15th anniversary this year. If I have left anyone out, I apologize.

As I was looking at churches during my search, the fact that Union Church sponsors a scout troop was a selling point for me. Troop 29 is currently flourishing. I gave the Invocation at a Court of Honor last year and I think there were something like 25 scouts in attendance. How great is that?

The Boy Scouts of America is an organization with a storied history. There is a legend associated with its beginning. An American newspaperman named W.D. Boyce was in London. He was in a typical London pea soup fog. A Boy Scout assisted Boyce in finding his hotel and refused a tip because he was doing his boy scout duty. Boyce

contacted the Boy Scout Association in London, got some printed material on them, and came back to get a Congressional Commission to start the BSA. That was in 1910. The truth of the fog and tip story has been challenged, but it is apocryphal so I'm going with it.

Not a lot happened right away. It wasn't until 1918 when a gentleman named James West took leadership and really created the great institution we have today.

So far, I have spoken of the fine men who have been instrumental in the leadership of the BSA and Troop 29. Now, it's time to talk about the boys. The best way for me to do that I think, is to tell the story of one boy and the affect that scouting had in his life. That boy would be me. I am proud to say that I am an Eagle Scout.

I did not go through Troop 29. Actually, Troop 29 started when I was 15 years old and in Boy Scouts. I was in Troop 2 in Weymouth. My Scout Master was Franklin Pratt, my most unforgettable character. I can't tell my story without telling a few Mr. Pratt stories.

Mr. Pratt was in his eighties when I was in scouts. He had a point system. You gained points for attendance, moving up in rank, getting merit badges, and having good conduct. The top point earners got to go on a trip with Mr. Pratt. I went on two trips, one to CA, and one to the outer banks in NC.

We were in Mr. Pratt's International Harvester that was part car and part bus. The CA trip lasted a month. We camped out the whole way, never in a campground. A few of the stops were Washington DC, Gettysburg, the Grand Canyon, and Mount Rushmore. There were many, many, more sights. Imagine being 14 years old and sleeping under the stars in Monument Valley, Colorado and seeing the depth of the sky with zero light pollution. Mr. Pratt told us to shake out our sneakers before putting them on. Sure enough, I did that and a scorpion fell out and scooted away.

Mr. Pratt was an amazing tour guide. He was so knowledgeable about every place we went and everything we saw, and he could explain it in language we could easily understand. Back home, I was in Troop 2 when President Kennedy was assassinated. Mr. Pratt had in his possession the daily newspapers reporting the deaths of incumbent presidents going back to Abraham Lincoln. Yes, I held in my hands, and read the newspaper account of the assassination of President Lincoln.

One scout meeting, Mr. Pratt brought in a phonograph built by Thomas Alva Edison. The record was the size and shape of the cardboard core of a roll of toilet paper. The first record he put on was Edison's voice telling us how he had built that machine. The second record was Al Jolson singing. There's many, many more stories but you get the idea as to why Mr. Pratt is my most unforgettable character.

What I'd like to really talk about is not just my experience in scouting but what effect it has had on my life. To say the experience is significant is an understatement.

When I gave the Invocation at the Troop 29 Court of Honor last year, I spoke to the boys directly and I'd like to do that again today. I'd also like the Sunday schoolers who we kept in worship to hear this. This is for the girls, too. Girl Scouts is an equally wonderful program.

I told a story of when I was in my twenties and fishing off of Martha's Vineyard. We were in a sport fishing boat and saw another boat in distress in a heavy sea. We got close to them and they threw me a line. I tied a bowline so we could tow them to safety. I helped save two lives because I was a Boy Scout and know my knots.

Only four percent of scouts make Eagle, but even if you don't make Eagle, scouting is totally worth doing. It is full of life lessons. Just this week, I was on my way into Roach Brothers supermarket. A large SUV pulled up to the front door. The passenger door opened but only partially, I saw an older woman who had a cane was struggling to open the heavy door and get all the way to the pavement.

I opened the door for her, helped her down, moved her toward the store, and closed the SUV door. She was very grateful. I just thought of the Scout Slogan, 'Do a good turn daily.' I'm not bragging

that I'm such a good guy, I'm just saying that I carry my Boy Scout lessons to this day.

Now, I'm going to ask the scouts and scout leaders to please stand and join me in reciting the Scout Law. "A Scout is: Trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent." Thank you, you can sit down now. For me, that is not just a list of vocabulary words. Every day of my life, I try to live up to the Scout Law. I fail at it. I'm not very thrifty, for example. But it is a code of conduct that frames the man I try to be. Boys and girls, I'm here to tell you that whether you make Eagle or not, those are words to live by.

Now onto what makes my wife roll her eyes. Be Prepared. I admit, I'm a little nutty about this one. I am the cook in the household. I have everything sliced and diced, all herbs and spices next to the stove at the ready, then I turn on the stove and stay at the stove until the food is done. When I was in seminary at Boston University School of Theology, during Spring Break, when the undergraduates were partying in warm weather, I was writing my final papers. I would spend the rest of the semester redacting the papers until submission.

Today is Feb 12. I wrote this sermon on Jan 24. I tweaked it many times since, was here in the sanctuary practicing it, yesterday, and again at 7AM this morning. Be Prepared!

My brother was a United States Marine. He was a fighter pilot in Viet Nam. The Marines shaped his character more than any other experience in his life. You hear about the Marines all the time from him. It defines him to this day.

I can say that that is true for me when it comes to the Boy Scouts. I have often joked that we say, "Once a Scout, always a Scout; kind of like the Marines, only shorter pants."

So, congratulations to Troop 29 on this auspicious anniversary. Thank you to all the many leaders who used the program to shape boys into good men. I encourage you to continue this important work.

And to the boys and girls: I know that there are many things competing for your involvement. Everything from sports to music, to theater, to art, to clubs and on and on. Just take it from one old pastor; you will find no better activity than the scouting movement. AMEN