

Sermon: August 24, 2008  
“Happiness and a 7 oz. beer”

In the gospel lesson this morning ... Jesus gives to Peter “*the keys to the kingdom.*”

I wonder if this makes Peter happy.

Peter was a stubborn ol’ blue collar guy ---- fisherman, before he became one of the “chosen ones.”

He had a bad day when he denied 3 times that he ever knew Jesus.

Peter always seems a bit stern to me ----- even tho’ you would think the “keys to the kingdom” would make him happy.

Which brings me to wondering ----- do you have the keys to your kingdom????

What is “happiness” anyway?

When are you the happiest? ... what are you doing? ... where are you?

When was the last time you were truly ----- down-deep-inside-your-soul ----- happy????

HAPPINESS can be very elusive. We try to “find” it ----- in our work, in our families, in our religion.

We look for happiness in some relatively healthy places ... and, at times, in some un-healthy ones.

It’s interesting to me. I look at my humble-puny life. I think about what it is that I truly believe in.

As I get older ... I have some pretty reflective moments. Looking back ... looking inward ... still dreaming a bit of what is yet to come.

I think of all the joyous moments my family and I have shared. I re-live some of the pain ... the missed turns ... the combination of failures and victories.

I think of Jesus ----- his words and actions ... the healing, forgiveness, and hope he brings.

Yesterday I had the honor of listening to two “philosophers” ... actually, story – tellers.

First --- Keith Rinehart from our church ... as he spoke at his father’s funeral yesterday. A quaint – little funeral home in down-town Wilmington. Keith’s relationship with his dad --- like many of ours --- was full of peaks and valleys. Yesterday he told a story ... about a fishing trip he took with his dad ... when he was a young boy.

The poles, the bait, the long walk ... getting lost ... catching nothing ... laughing un-controllably at the end of a long day. It was a moment ... just a moment ... and it’s in those moments where real joy is found.

On the way home ---- listening to John Williams ... his morning show on WGN.

He’s talking about his dad. His dad didn’t drink much ... and really didn’t like beer ----- except when he mowed the lawn. Afterwards he would sit on the porch ... admire his lawn ... and crack open one of those little half beers ----- 7-ouncers. I’ve never had a 7-ounce beer in my life!!

A moment ... a memory ... still bringing joy into John Williams’ life.

So often I expect too much out of life.

I want my job to make me happy --- all the time. .

I want my family to bring me happiness --- all the time.

I want people to agree with me and like me --- all the time.

I want being a parent and grandparent to make me happy --- all the time.

Then ... when life doesn’t meet our expectations ... we can easily get angry, or bitter, or cynical.

John Williams’ story brought me back to my childhood ... when my grandparents lived in Roseland.

I watched my grandpa cut the lawn in his sleeveless undershirt. It had one of those “Swedish extensions” at the bottom ... where his belly buried his waist-line.

Afterwards ... my grandpa would sit on his little wooden porch, with 6 wooden steps.

He’d pop open a Hamm’s beer ... turn on his transistor radio and listen to the White Sox.

The look in his eyes was one of raw joy and contentment. For the moment ----- LIFE WAS GOOD!!

“Grandpa, can I taste your beer?” “No, Donnie ... your time will come.” (It sure has!)  
“Grandpa ... I want to be like you someday.”  
He smiled ... and now I am.

Yes, I remember my grandpa being bed-ridden with cancer.  
I remember his tears when his best buddy died.

I remember my parents having to help them financially ..... when they sadly moved from their  
house in Roseland.

But ----- I will never forget the moment ... the memory ... the front porch ... the love & contentment.

Jude and I are sitting on our front porch. The lawn is cut ... the beer tastes good. It's a beautiful summer  
night. Jude looks at me, smiles, and says ---- “This is my favorite time of the year.”

It's coming ... September-October ... the kool-ness, the change of colors ...

We'll be on the porch, and Jude will say: “Don, this is my favorite time of the year.”

December will come ... the first dusting of snow ... we'll stand on the front porch, and Jude will say to  
me ---- “Don, this is my favorite time of the year.”

Yes --- spring will come, the tulips will peek through the ground ... and I'll hear  
those words again: “This is my FAVORITE TIME YEAR!!”

For Jude and the seasons ...it's the joy of the moment.  
It's the experience of NOW.

Too often ... I try to find joy & happiness in the finished product. But in life --- there aren't many finished  
products. Maybe cutting the lawn ...

*The important stuff ----- being a friend ... being a parent ... your marriage ... sharing what you have ...  
the seasons ... being human ... being “the best we can be” ...  
always an on-going journey.*

Later today ... each one of us will “turn in” ... we'll call it a day.  
We'll look back: so much more “we could have done.”  
We'll look ahead ... I really can't “control” tomorrow.

Let us remember ... it's in life's moments that we see the *face of Jesus*.  
It's in life's moments that God's spirit nudges us and speaks to us.

I guess this is why ----- THE WORLD is too big ...  
but FRONT AND BACK PORCHES are just the right size.

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