

Sermon: January 6, 2008  
“Slow ... and PROUD!!”

As we move into 2008 ... I don't really make “resolutions” ... but I try to have a couple personal/spiritual goals. This year? ----- I want to hold onto what is REAL ... and I want to make sure I'm not PHONY. Sure there are times when we have to be a bit “phony” ---- just to protect ourselves and others. But ... it's important to stay real. Go ahead ..... don't like me, get mad at me ... but not because I'm phony.

Anyway ----- my daughter Casey hands me a book ... the title: LOTTERY.

Written by a lady whose dad won the lottery. Her first book.

It's a simple story about a young man who was labeled as “retarded” in school. It's too bad ---- how we take a word like “retarded” ... and turn it into a word labeling people and putting others down. RETARDED has a very basic-simple meaning. It means “slow.” I'm “retarded” in many areas ... very slow to grasp some things ... and it's ok ... it's human.

PERRY would stand up to people when they called him “retarded” -----

*“I am not retarded ... I am SLOW ... and I am proud of who I am!!”*

Sure --- people would take advantage of him ... many would make fun of him ... even his own family would betray him.

But ----- not his buddy KEITH!!

Keith wasn't “pretty.” Often he would drink too much ... his messy un-washed pony-tail drove some nuts ... he lived on his boat ... and when he bent-over to pick something up ... well, you didn't want to look at his back-side. But ----- KEITH WAS LOYAL!!

He would never cheat or betray anyone. And ...if someone treated Perry with any bit of disrespect ...

**KEITH WOULD BE THERE WITH THE WRATH OF GOD!!**

Going to war????? ... you want Keith by your side!!

You know? ... life is about who we are.

Life is about discovering & enjoying & nurturing the God-given dignity deep within our soul.

When we discover the miracle of our own humanity ... when we can come to terms with who & where we are in life ... when we quit trying to be someone else or someone we were never meant to be ... when we use our own spirit & heart-song to define who we are (and not some test score or what other people say) ----- then we can discover, fight for, and embrace the humanity of others.

Things went along fairly smoothly for Perry ..... until he won the lottery.

Now ... the family who betrayed him ... they called him.

Those who labeled him ... they wanted his riches.

What most people forgot ... or never took time to know ... is this simple truth:

**PERRY WAS ALREADY RICH ... long before he won the lottery.**

--he has the best friend in the world.

--he has self-esteem and a genuine love for the human spirit.

--he has pride and goodness in his soul.

--he doesn't need money to make him happy.

--his world is simple ... his outlook on life is un-complicated.

-he has more love & goodness & God & Jesus in his soul than his whole family put together.

Most of all ----- he has Keith ... whose love for Perry has nothing to do with money.

What is it about greed?

What is it about money?

What is it about labels? ... and our definition of success??

Over the years ... I have wrestled long and hard with my faith. I'm sure many of you have, too.

For 33+ years I've preached about God ... I've tried to teach kids about God.

I went to 8 years of post-high school education ... trying to earn the privilege of wearing robes like these.

I've prayed and I've doubted.

I've talked about God on Sundays ... when I wasn't sure God was even a part of my life.

I've pretended to be strong when I wasn't ... I've pretended to know answers when I didn't have a clue!!

I've often wondered why my best friends are sinners ... and when someone religious comes along, they turn the other way and want nothing to do with me.

I've often wonder how a person like me can be a minister ... and why pipe-fitters & custodians & people like Perry are my heroes.

How can people steal from their own family? ... rat on their friends? ... claim to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior ... but when they see the Perrys and Keiths of this world ... they pretend they don't exist.

Well ----- I don't wonder anymore.

I know now ----- thanks to lots of people like you ----- GOD IS NOT ABOVE LIFE ... GOD IS IN ALL OF LIFE!! God does not control life ... he gives us life ... and loves us every step of the way.

Perry is not retarded ... or "less than you or me" ... or "behind" ----- Perry is Perry.

In God's kingdom ... this is enough.

Keith isn't some long-haired goof you don't want your kids hangin' around ...

Keith is the best friend anyone could ever have.

Life is a lot like the lottery, in some ways.

There are a lot of chances involved ... life can be a crap-shoot.

Each of us gets one ticket ... one chance ... with no guarantees.

Every once-in-a-while ... someone hits the jackpot ... and then everyone wants a piece of you.

I've discovered ... in life ----- I'VE ALREADY HIT THE JACKPOT!!

My jackpot is sitting over there ... it's my family.

My jackpot is all over this room ... friends, the church, the moments we share.

The jackpot is believing in a power... bigger than us, but always inside of us.

Sometimes our jackpot may wear a ponytail.

It's called friendship.

It's called love.

It's called loyalty and goodness.

Yes, winning the lottery can be a long-shot.

Living a simple life isn't easy.

Combine the two ----- and it's called a MIRACLE.

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