

Sermon: June 29, 2008
“Back to basics ... & outdoor weddings”

It was one of those “infamous” outdoor weddings.

(A bit of un-solicited-but-free pre-marital counseling. If you are a worry-wart ... if you “sweat the small stuff” ... don’t have an outdoor wedding. Weather is one of those things you can’t control!! ... no matter how “controlling” you think you may be!!)

The wedding is supposed to start at 4:30. The goof ... pretending to be in charge ... seems to be in no hurry, as the storm clouds gather. I tell him ----- “This may be one wedding we want to start on time!@!!”

The wedding begins at 4:45 ... a few drops start coming down.

And then ----- THE RAINS AND THE WIND BEGIN!! So much for prayers and any kind of reflection.

Vows ... rings ... blessing ... “let’s get the heck out of here.”

By the time we get from the 1st tee to the clubhouse ... we are as wet as wet can be!@!!

After toweling off and blow-drying my Bible ... I look for the bride and groom.

Hair-dos a bit ragged ... drenched suit and wedding dress ... and she smiles:

“We are married and in love ... this is what counts. And the wedding service? ----- we’ll be telling this story for a long time!!”

I admire them. What really does matter? ---- the weather? ... the dress? ... the suit?

No ---- what matters is being in love.

The essence of life and happiness ----- is getting through all the layers of “stuff” that seemingly define who we are ... digging deep through all the gunk ... and discovering the very soul of who we are.

What’s important and what’s not.

Sometimes life hits us on top of the head ... and it’s like an angel tells us:

“Now ---- do you understand what’s important and what’s not???”

*Maybe it’s looking at your rain-drenched bride ... whose \$200 perm has just been washed away ... and she looks --- to you --- to be more beautiful than ever.

*Maybe it’s watching one of your kids struggle ... you see your son or daughter hurting ... and you realize, once again, your love has no boundaries or conditions. Your wallet may have a boundary or two ... but not your love.

*Maybe it’s watching a lady with no arms ... learning how to feed herself ... after coming home from a mission, where she is reaching out to others.

*Maybe it’s when the word cancer or Alzheimer’s or MS or osteoporosis begins to take-over your life ... and you begin wondering if anything will ever be “normal.”

EVERYDAY ----- we are called to discover or re-discover the very essence of life.

The essence of life is our soul ... it’s our heart.

It’s planting a rose of decency and goodness ---- into the soil of our humanity ... and letting it bloom, letting it grow. It’s so easy to forget or to ignore what’s important ----- as we spend each day ... going about our business. Somehow ---- our jobs, our routines, our bills, our lawns, our schedule ... this becomes THE WORLD. And then ... once-in-a-while ... life kind-of clobbers us over the head ... and we are forced to discover: LIFE IS NOT ALL ABOUT ME.

Maybe it’s one of God’s humble messengers ... reminding us ---- life is about life ... life is about goodness ... life is about grace & reaching-out & doing good stuff.

I really enjoy this little “snippet” from the Gospel ... where Jesus keeps asking Peter: DO YOU LOVE ME?
By the third time ... Peter is rather annoyed ----- JESUS, YOU KNOW I LOVE YOU!!

Then Jesus has these very penetrating words:

*Peter, when you were young ... you could fasten your belt whenever you wanted ... and go wherever you wanted.
But when you get older ... someone else will fasten that belt and take you to places you may
not want to go.*

Isn't this true?

As we get older ----- we have to "visit" places we never bargained for. When you care ... when you love ...
when you believe ----- we end-up "visiting" some unexpected places:
--- "places" like old age and arthritis ...
re-hab centers and 12-step programs ... chemotherapy and assisted living ...
"places" like Iraq or an earthquake in China ...

Jesus is telling Peter ... and he's telling us ----- BELIEVING IN ME ISN'T "EASY" ...
it's not exactly what you may think it's cracked-up to be.
You will have moments of doubt ... once-in-a-while you will wonder ...
people might laugh at you or try to take you down ...
it's not easy living with hope and faith ... you know it ... I know it!!

I consider myself pretty lucky. Like most of you ----- I've faced road-blocks I never bargained for.
And ---- I've been the recipient of blessings I don't deserve.

My faith ... that "inner something" inside of me ... strengthening me and my family to face whatever moments
lie ahead ... this "little seed" inside my soul ----- IT IS VERY PRECIOUS.

Faith needs to be firm, but gentle ... strong, but humble. We often want "to know it all" ... but our faith
reminds us ----- there is so much more we don't know ... and never will.
Faith is very private ... yet it opens us up to the wonders of the world.

I've had a little battle lately with our local paper. It's about the so-called "pastor's column." All I do is e-mail
my weekly sermons to the paper ... and they print them or don't print them at their discretion. I guess the
"main dude" at the paper is upset because a couple other clergy have written some stuff that hasn't gone
over well with the public. So ----- sounds like my sermons will be in there ... at the most ... every 8-10 weeks.
So, I called the paper ... shared some thoughts.

*I had a feeling this would happen, at some point. I don't appreciate it when you "lump me in" with everyone
else. My sermons are VERY PERSONAL ... they come from the depth of my soul.*

*And now ... because one or two people write stuff that's divisive ... now, you take it out on me and those who
enjoy the messages I share. Our world needs more open-ness and good thoughts ... not decisions like this!!*

I realize more and more ----- RELIGION HAS LOST ITS SOUL.

It has become divisive ... political ... and often harsh.

Maybe ... like a bride and groom ... in the middle of a rain-soaked ceremony ... we need to cut to what is really
important ... we need to get to the very essence of life ... and love ... and religion ... and faith.

When our days on this humble planet are over ... all I want someone to say about you or me ... well, the words
are in the 2nd lesson for today ... the book of Timothy:

I have fought the good fight ... I have finished the race ... I have kept the faith.

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