

Sermon: October 19, 2008
"Nick, what happened??"

It is just a little "blurb" in today's sports section in the Chicago Sun-Times. But reading it sent a chill up-and-down my spine. Nick Weatherspoon --- former star of the University of Illinois basketball team, and former Chicago Bull (which should make him a saint!!) --- he died yesterday at the age of 58.

I remember him.

I admired him ... rooted for him.

He's younger than me ... he died ... I wonder --- what happened?

I visited a good friend yesterday. She's not much older than me. She's been living with and battling cancer for over 4 years ... she's wearing down.

I think of the Kieran Conways of the world ... well, there aren't many like Kieran!!

Entertainers. We applaud them ... sometimes we "use" them.

Then something like cancer strikes ... and we are reminded: behind the music and funny hats ... underneath the laughter and the costumes ----- *it' me!! ... human being ... child of God!!*

You look the roles you play ... I look at mine.

I'm more than a mom or school teacher ... a basketball player or entertainer.

Inside --- I am a passionate, unique human being.

God's child. Child of the universe.

Preacher, teacher, broker, lawyer ... dad, wife, spouse, lover ... caretaker and friend ... 401K weary, therapist, gardener. I live with no legs ... MS ... cancer.

I am inheritor of the sunset, dreamer, prayer-giver ... Olympic athlete, bench-warmer next door ...

Mr. Fix-it, comptroller, pre-school teacher. I just lost my house!! My car is broken & I can't afford to fix it.

THIS IS ME!! THIS IS MY JOURNEY!!

I need a little hope ... I need some help ... a prayer or two, some support.

I need to dream ... I need to fight and stand-up for who I am ... I need to try ... I need just a little more time!

Or ... maybe ... finally ----- I need to "let go."

Yes, maybe it's time ... whose time? ... my time? ... God's time??

Nick Weatherspoon ---- dead at the age of 58. Just another athlete? Just another Bull?

Just another person I watch to fill-up a Saturday night?

What about me? ... and you? ----- what's our place, our purpose, our role, our destiny?

Could that be my name in the paper tomorrow? ----- *Don Borling ... Olympic preacher ... dead at the age of 59. Pastor of the largest temple in Orland Park. Or Bob at 63, Francis at 90, Roberta only 13,*

Cheryl 38 ... WHAT DO I LEAVE BEHIND? ---- our dash, our legacy, the memories.

It's all about decency and goodness, mercy and forgiveness ----- being a dreamer, a worker, a hoper, a friend!

How about the words of the prophet in the first lesson this morning ...

"I am the Lord ... there is no other. Besides me ... there is no god.

I arm you ... yet you don't know me. From the rising of the sun to its setting ... there is no one besides me.

I form the light ... I create the darkness. I, the Lord --- do all these things."

God tells us ----- this world is mine!! Quit trying to pretend you own it ... because you don't!!

Take care of it ... enjoy it ----- but quit living like you can do anything you want with it!

Yes ... a bit of a reminder ... a bit of perspective.

Look around.

There is lots of suffering ... lots of hardship.

Just stop by Manor Care up the road ... walk up and down the hallways. Stop by a VA hospital ... visit a couple of veterans and hear their stories. Look at the prayer book ... look into the eyes of people walking

through the mall ... sit in a hospital waiting room, and listen to the “sounds of silence.”
ALL THIS SUFFERING AND HARD TIMES ----- it all calls us to renew our commitment to live life with
passion ... and with grace ... and to hold up the human spirit ... to be beacons of hope.
People are constantly trying to get us off-track. Whacko-preachers, phony religion ... some of the people we
work with ... some of your class-mates at school ----- they want you to hate and to be afraid
and to be selfish.

Well ... **DON'T!!**

Don't get sucked-in. Don't be a part of what isn't right and good.
They tried to suck Jesus in. In the gospel ... they tell Jesus what a “good man he is” ... so: SHOULD WE
PAY TAXES TO CAESAR???? ... thinking Jesus would say something “bad” about the ruler.
Jesus looks at the coin: Whose picture is this?
It's Caesar ... they reply.
Well then ... says Jesus ----- give it to him!!
Life isn't a game ... life is about what's important ... and what's in your soul.

INNOCENCE ... GOODNESS ... ***have power ... but only if we let it and live it!!***

When Jude and I go to the Riviera to work out ... we bring Q ... so he can “play with his friends” in the play-
room. On our way out the other day ... I hand my lock & key to the attendant. Q says to me very loudly (so
everyone can hear) ----- *I like that lady ... she is my friend!!*

Why? ... I ask.

BECAUSE SHE IS BROWN LIKE ME.

We all laugh ... and smile ... because DIVERSITY IS FUN.

We get home, and I cut the grass. Q sees our neighbor's 5-year-old twins across the street. We are a “diverse”
neighborhood --- one Hispanic family, and then “us-Swedes.”

Q: I want to go over and see my friends. So, I walk across the street. Right in front of the dad (Frank) ... Q
says to me: *“I've never been inside their house???”*

I remind Q ----- it helps to be invited.

Frank and I are talking ... I turn around --- “Frank, have you seen Q?”

“Don, I think he just walked into our house!!” The beeeeeooty of innocence, the power of humanity ...
the lessons of joy and laughter young kids teach us!!

In the word of Father James Kavanaugh:

*“All the joy in the world takes possession of me today. Unending nights, dark days --- they are forgotten.
Deserting friends, bitter enemies, un-kept promises ... they have lost their poser.*

Why? ---- because the sky belongs to me. The breeze is like music. I am a stranger nowhere.

GOD IS EVERYWYERE.”

It's not going to be easy. But TODAY:

I'm saying “good-bye” to that which brings me down.

***I'm saying “hello” to the passion I need to live each day ---- with gusto and purpose and
GOODNESS IN MY HEART.***

Nick Weatherspoon ... wherever you are. Kieran Conway and Dawn Kelch.

To the “brown lady” at the Riviera ... to the twins across the street ... to an “old man” at Manor Care ...

WE ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST ... together.

And ... we build ... yes, we build up ... and ----- we tear down no more!!

