

Sermon: March 1, 2009

“A defining week”

It's a week I'll never forget.

I'm sure you've had those. Days ... weeks ... months??? Times in your life ... where you experience the full spectrum of human emotions: being “high on life” at one time ... followed by raw exhaustion ... wondering if you'll have the strength to get up tomorrow.

I remember talking to Kieran Conway one day ... in his living room. How “kool” was it ... last night ... having Kieran and Lorraine at the spaghetti dinner?!!@!??

Anyway ... Kieran begins apologizing to me for not returning my phone calls right away.

I tell him ---- no apologies needed. Nobody returns my phone calls!!

Then Kieran says:

“Don, let me share something. I'm sitting here ... my cell phone is only 4 feet away on that table. The phone rings ... it's probably you. The phone is right there!! ... and I don't have the strength to pick it up!! That is how much chemotherapy can kick my ass!!”

I can't imagine.

And to think he and his wife made the effort to come to our dinner last night --- incredible!!

In case you ever wonder what you and your prayers mean to folks ... like Kieran and Lorraine ... whom you may not know ----- love, concern, prayer: it's life-changing!!

So, Thursday morning I'm driving to Hammond, Indiana ... to share in the funeral for Vern Bock, Sr. What a journey for Vern and Mary Ann and their families. Vern, Sr. had lived with Alzheimer's for 10 years. Many of you know what it's like. Caring for someone with Alzheimer's is all-consuming. Every time you visit the person you love ... it's like “they die everyday.”

As I'm pulling into the funeral home parking lot ... Craig Nelson calls. His granddaughter --- little Drew --- has just died in his arms. I get “chills” up and down my spine as he tells me ... I feel the same way right now, as I share the story. The “alpha and the omega” ... “the beginning and the end” ... a life so young ... another life --- long and vigorous.

On our way home from the funeral ... the phone rings again: “Hey, Rev, did year about Norm Van Lier?”

Norm has a special place in our hearts ... and we in his heart, too.

He's been here. He's talked to you. He loved the interaction with this humble place.

It's interesting ... when someone dies ... oh, the tributes come. Lots of accolades. But Norm was lonely and fragile, too ... forgotten by many. He loved “connecting” with us ordinary folks.

In the midst of all this, I am reminded ----- if there is someone in your life you love ... someone who is important to you ... don't wait 'til he/she dies to say how much you love and care.

DO IT NOW!! ... YES, THE MOMENT IS NOW!!

Later that day ... Joe drops by the office to talk about the spaghetti dinner. He kind-of smiles at me:

“Don, what else can happen today????”

An hour later ... Nancy Ellis calls. Tom's dad just passed away.

I go outside ... look to the heavens: “Lord, is it time for the rapture????”

Yesterday we had 300 people in the gym --- spaghetti, lots of laughter ... good food, fine wine.

As we prepare for the dinner ... 500+ people are coming through the church to pay their respects to “baby Drew” and her grieving family. Drew's candle ... her journey, her family ----- they have impacted the very texture of who we are as a church.

You might think ----- the raucous laughter of a spaghetti dinner and the quiet tears for a little baby have little to do with each other. Well ... they have everything to do with each other.

Many of the same people gathering in the gym last night ... are the same ones who shed tears for Drew earlier in the day. And ----- the reason we gather in the gym for a dinner to raise money for our church ... well, it's to support this humble place ... so the door is always open when you need to pray, to say "good-bye," to give you hope in an often harsh world.

Which brings me to the heart and soul of what religions is all about.
In the first lesson today ... God seems apologetic for sending a flood to destroy the wickedness of his people.
So, he says to Noah: *This will never happen again. I am establishing a new covenant with you ... and with every living creature on this earth. This covenant is real ... it's sacred ... it will last forever.*

This relationship between us and God ... between God and life ...

IT HAS NO LABEL.

It belongs to no religion ... no denomination.

It's just life. It's basic and simple ... it's not all that complicated.

Oh, life is complicated ... but God's love is not. We try to make it complicated ... we goof it up as much as possible ... but it doesn't have to be this way!!

So, when you are too tired to reach for the phone ...

When you are mopping the kitchen floor at midnight after the spaghetti dinner ... and you wonder if anyone cares ...

When you look at your little baby ... and wonder about "what could have been" ...

When Alzheimer's takes away your strength and tests your faith ...

PLEASE REMEMBER the witness of a little 5-month-old baby ... who can't speak for herself ... but, in the quietness of her soul, she challenges us ...

to be real

to be good

to be kind and gentle

may our religion always be human, and laced with courage ...

may our faith be uncomplicated, yet strong ...

may our religion be fun ... yet spirit-filled ...

Last night ... there was a moment.

Anne Fritz is going through chemo ... and she introduced herself to Kieran, who is going through the same thing. They talked ... they smiled ... they bumped heads ... not one speck of hair between them!!

That is religion.

That is the covenant, coming alive.

Anne and Kieran ... they are "in it" together ... and so are we all.

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