

Sermon: June 6, 2010

“The coach”

One of the great coaching legends left us this week.

Funny --- I used “to preach about sports” lots in my younger years. One of my buddies asked me recently ----
“how come you don’t talk sports much anymore???”

Today ... it’s time to talk sports again!!

Whether you like sports or not ... we’ve all had contact with COACHES. You, your kids, your nephew or
niece ... we’ve all seen coaches in action.

COACHES are an interesting lot. Could be the person who manages a t-ball team full of pre-schoolers ...
or the high-priced coach of a professional team ...

No matter what or where: COACHES SET THE TONE for his/her team.

They way they walk and talk ... how they treat the kids or their peers ... how they choose to share their
skills ... they can really have an impact on someone’s life. There are coaches who inspire young people “to be
the very best they can be” ... and there are others who may inspire you NEVER TO PLAY THAT
SPORT AGAIN!!

In a way ... all of us are “coaches.” People watch us as old people or young people ... people watch us parent
and grandparent ... they look to see what kind of friends we are ... how we do our jobs ... what kind of teacher
are you? ... board member? ... Lutheran???

Others watch us live ... some watch us die ... they watch us succeed and fail ... as we handle all of life’s
varied moments ... “we are on stage.”

So ... John Wooden ... legendary basketball coach at UCLA ... he died this week ... 99.5 years old.
Teacher, counselor, philosopher ... who just happens to be the best b-ball coach ever. His life was never about
his amazing record ... even tho’ ... from 1966 thru 1973 ... his teams were 205 wins, 5 losses ...
and they won 88 games in a row.

What makes John Wooden special is his heart and soul. Here are some words from one of the latest books
he wrote ----- absolutely good stuff!!

Everything in the world is passed down.

Every piece of knowledge is something that has been shared by someone else.

If you understand it as I do, mentoring becomes your true legacy.

It is the greatest inheritance you can give to others.

It is why you get up every day ----- to teach and be taught.

Now I get it!!

It’s why I walk out back every morning ... and have spiritual coffee with my mom, dad, and brother.

It’s why I get goose-bumps when I read all the names on the bricks.

It’s why we pray here ... it’s why we have St. Coletta’s and basketball on Tuesday nights ...

It’s why we do all that we do ----- WE WANT TO PASS SOMETHING ON!!

We plant seeds ... we want people to feel welcome and important ...

we want folks to know that THEIR LIVES MATTER!!

It’s humbling to know and to realize ----- everything we know, everything we discover,
everything we are it’s been planted by those who have gone before us.

And now the torch is passed to us ----- to plant seeds for those who come after.

In the gospel story today ... Jesus raises up a dead man. Amazing ... a miracle.

What’s also amazing is ----- the “dead man” could be you or me.

You see? ... in life there is always hope.

- It's about the addict, who struggles to stay sober.
- The aging man or woman, who fights hard to stay alert and strong.
- The depressed young woman, who begins to re-discover her self-esteem.
- The cancer patient, the diabetic, the guy with painful arthritis ... who continues to stand tall and ooze incredible grace and courage.
- Ordinary people like you and me ... who often get weary and tired ... maybe lonely and tempted "to cash it in" and then a small act of kindness "brings us back to life."
Yes ... Jesus can even raise us back to living and loving.

The time will come ... someday ... when each of us will leave this earth.
For John Wooden ... well, 99+ years.
We have pictures of two of our young people ... on the wall just outside the church ... who left us at the all-too-young age of 16.
We have bricks out back of several young people, whose struggles ended their lives too soon.
What's amazing is ----- we still talk about them.
Their courage ... their smiles ... their struggles ... even in death ---- they become our teachers.

For the life of me ... I will never understand being prejudice or being mean to another person ... because of his/her color ... because they are different ... because of their religion or life-style.
To put someone else down "just because" ... it is as wrong-as-wrong-can-be!!

It's like this wedding I had on Saturday ----- a so-called "non-practicing Christian" (the groom) and a "non-practicing-Hindu" (the bride). I went back into my seminary wedding manual ... only to discover ... if you take a non-practicing Christian and a non-practicing Hindu ... add them together & divide by two ----- out pops a POTENTIAL LUTHERAN!@!!

Her family is from India .. and they have flown in for the wedding. I have the rehearsal at Silver Lake on Thursday evening. I finish working-out ... take Q for a quick swim ... rush over to the rehearsal in fresh sweat clothes and a bad hat ... walk into the room ----- and there is the bride's family: beautiful Indian dresses ... colorful markings on their foreheads ... they look at me, as if to say: "Couldn't you have spent a bit more money to get a minister who at least looks like one!@!!"
After the rehearsal, I go up to the grandma ... a very elegant, aging Indian woman ... "My name is Don ... it's an honor to meet you ... and you came here all the way from India!@!!"
She looks at me and says: "AND I CAME HERE JUST TO MEET YOU!!"
She gives me an incredibly warm embrace.

The wedding on Saturday was beautiful.
You were there ... with me. You ... each of you ... *you make moments like this possible.*
You keep this door open ----- the coffee, the seeds of goodness and decency ...
the human spirit ... the bond we all share ... it spreads and makes a difference in so many lives.

So ... in life ... when it comes to the stuff mattering the most ... in the words of the song
beginning our worship service this morning ...
"Here I am, Lord ... SEND ME."

