

Sermon: February 6, 2011

“Jesus the athlete”

Early last evening ... it's a beautiful sight. The sun setting out back ... behind our military flags. The piled-high snow, at least for a few moments, doesn't feel like the enemy. A simple beauty about everything.

Early this morning ... me and my trusty dog come to church ... the snow begins to fall ... I can still hear the forecast from the previous night ---- “just a dusting.” 2 inches later ... I look up the word “dusting” in the dictionary.

Once again ... I get out the shovel ... put on my gloves ... look up into the sky:

“Here I am, Lord ... send me ...”

Send me into a world of blizzards, wind, and cold.

Send me into my neighbor's driveway. She lives alone ... she is afraid, when she looks outside and sees all the snow.

Send me to the altar ... on my knees ... to pray for little Connor ... who is fighting the battle of a life-time.

Send me to work ... to re-hab ... send me to school ... wherever I have to go.

BUT, PLEASE, LORD ---- no more snow for a while!@!!

We've discovered this week ---- there is so much in life over which we have no control.

The weather ... other peoples' attitudes.

In the middle of all this ... Jesus tells us: *“We are the salt of the earth ... we are a light unto the world.”*

We can be selfish and crabby and negative ... we can criticize and complain ...

OR ----- we can walk Jesus' walk ... and be a LIGHT UNTO OTHERS.

Super Bowl Sunday today.

I've been thinking about sports. I love sports. How about thinking about spring sports.

“When I was a kid ...” ----- these words make me sound so old. Oh, well ...

When I was a kid ... I loved summer vacation. Every morning (except Sunday ... that was church-day) ... I'd get my balloon-tire bike out of the garage. I had a basket on the front ... and two side-baskets in the rear. With one dollar in my pocket that would last me the whole day ... I loaded the baskets with a softball and bat ... glove ... basketball and

football ... a good pump ----- and I was off to the park for the day. My mom's only instructions:

“Be home for dinner!@!!”

We'd pick teams and fight. We argued like crazy.

Once-in-a-while David Duensing showed up. David lived with a disability ---- causing him to be a bit slow and awkward.

Nobody --- including me --- ever wanted him to be on their team. This is way back in my “pre-Fred” days ...

and I didn't get “kids' sermons” at my home church ... about reaching-out to those who are different.

I remember one day coming home ... and I was being very selfish and negative ----- complaining to my dad about how the other team was cheating ... and we lost because I had to have David Duensing on my team.

My dad was a man of few words. But on this evening he looked at me ... and he had that “Jesus-sermon-on-the-mount” look in his eyes: *“Donnie ... when you go the park tomorrow ... and if you are one of the captains picking teams ...*

YOU PICK DAVID DUENSING FIRST.”

Without knowing it ... the “seeds of Fred” were planted on that day.

I'm not much of an athlete anymore. But after all these years of playing and enjoying sports ... after years of being a poor sport, mixed-in with lots of David Duensing moments ... I have learned just a few things ...

one of them being:

***One of the greatest obstacles in life ... to being the best person each of us can be ...
is THE FEAR OF FAILURE.***

Whether you are a 4-year old, playing t-ball for the first time ...

A high school student, playing violin in the state solo contest ...

Head of streets & sanitation ... during a 2-foot snow storm ...

In the work-place, as a parent ...

When you live your life ... being afraid to make a mistake ... when you are afraid of what someone might say if you try something and fail ----- this cuts at the very fiber of your humanity. It stunts our creativity and spirit.

Have you ever been afraid of your coach?? I was in high school. My varsity baseball coach wasn't very pleasant.

I remember the day before my first varsity game. We had a meeting. After it was over ... I heard these words: "BORLING ... I WANT TO SEE YOU RIGHT NOW." I'm not sure he knew my first name ... it was always BORLING!!

He looks at me ... everyone else had gone.

He takes me by the collar "Borling ... I don't care if you are 0 for 75 this year ... you are my starting center-fielder tomorrow ... and you will be for every game." He walked away.

He set me free. I didn't have to worry about making a mistake or failing ... he believed in me.

Now ---- there is no excuse ... in life ... for not trying.

No excuse for not giving every day your very best ... no excuse for being lazy and not caring.

But none of us wants to be judged by our mistakes. We want and need to be judged and appreciated and loved for the spirit with which we live & work everyday.

I don't know if Jesus played sports. Most of us probably picture him as pretty laid-back and quiet.

But there is a deeply competitive side to our savior.

Remember when his beloved temple was being abused?? He came in and turned over those tables. I can just see the look in his eyes.

Remember when he saw how Herod was always sending his "henchmen" to try to corner him into saying something wrong?? He told Herod's followers: "You go tell THAT FOX ..."

The look. The spiritual determination.

How about on the cross??? ... he looks into the eyes of those who are killing him ... and says to his "father in heaven" ---- FATHER, FORGIVE THEM ... FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO."

Jesus' **spiritual determination** ... getting inside the hearts of his followers ... giving them the courage to face whatever comes their way.

The message is clear: SPIRITUAL DETERMINATION ... it's one of the keys to a fulfilling life.

We may not be rich in "stuff" ...

We may not have all our prayers and wishes answered the way we'd like ...

We will have moments of failure and falling short ...

But inside: **we will be strong.**

Yes, there is a super bowl game today ... enjoy it.

And remember ----- the spirit of competing and giving life our best:
it's our challenge everyday.

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