

Sermon: January 16, 2011

"Gotta believe"

The "out-back" at our church is precious to me.

I go out-back ... remember, reminisce, tell stories ...

On the one hand ---- it's fun to remember and exaggerate. Whenever I tell stories about my parents ... I can see you roll your eyes. You know ----- take whatever I say, divide by 3 ... and the truth is in there somewhere. It's easy to turn "regular folks" into saints ... especially when you love them.

It's also easy to stay bitter about some of the things that happened in our past.

Most of us ... at one time or another ... have been hurt by others.

And ---- honestly ... there are time when I certainly haven't done what I should for those who have loved me.

But my bride JUDE always reminds me:

Every moment ... every person we've met ... all the good times, bad times, and everything in-between ... our mistakes and victories ... the right-turns, left-turns, and wrong-turns ...

This is all part of who we are today.

We can't go back and re-do it. We can't pretend our past hasn't happened.

Each day ---- we need to own-up to who we are, what we are, where we have been ... and have the quiet courage to move ahead and face each new day.

This is what's so "kool" about believing in Jesus.

Just as I say this ... I'm thinking ----- in religious circles, we often get hung-up on what we supposedly "believe."

Do you believe in Jesus? Do you believe he is your Lord and Savior?

The key to our spirituality is not what we believe. The key is ----- Jesus believes in us.

Jesus didn't go around asking people to believe in him. Tax-collectors and sinners ... Jews and Gentiles ... priests and prostitutes ... the religious and non-religious ... the healthy and those banished to leper colonies ...

JESUS REACHES OUT TO ALL OF THEM ... AND TO ALL OF US.

He gives them hope, self-worth, acceptance, and a renewed sense of being God's child.

When you know someone believes in you ... when you know in your heart your journey is worth something ... when you know there is a power & presence always standing beside you ... THIS IS A GOOD EMPOWERING FEELING.

Jesus doesn't believe in me ... so I, in turn, will believe in him. Jesus doesn't believe in you so you will become a "Christian." Jesus believes in us because he believes in us ... we are his children!@!

What does Jesus want us to do???? ----- to walk in his sandals ... to walk in his footsteps.

Let's face it ... we can "believe" all we want ... we can say all the right things ... but LIFE IS ABOUT THE WALK.

It's about the journey ... it's about knowing we are believed-in ... so we, in turn, will believe in others.

It's one of the reasons I love it "out-back." I look at all those names ... I look back on my life ... and I think of all the people who **believed in me**. Yes, along the way ----- I've disappointed some people ... I've fallen short ... and yet their love and commitment never wavered. All of us have people in our lives ----- spouses and partners, kids & nieces & nephews, a cousin or two, the old guy down the block and they all need people who believe in them.

They need to be reminded: I AM WORTH SOMETHING.

The Sunday after Christmas ... two of our grand-kids were baptized here.

As usually happens with a baptism ... you bump into relatives you hardly ever see. You combine a baptism with free food-and-drink ... and you never know who will show up!!

One of my nephews was here. He lives in Virginia ... I haven't seen Westin in years. He's now in 8th grade.

As soon as the church service is over ... he changes into his basketball clothes.

For the rest of the day ... all he does is play basketball in the gym. Doesn't talk to anyone ... just plays ball.

My b-ball days are over. But I keep watching Westin.
I go into my closet ... dust – off my basketball shoes. Put on my work-out clothes and basketball shirt ...

“Hey, Westin ----- wanna play some ball????”

“Uncle Don, you still play??”

“I haven’t totally lost my touch yet!!”

We play one game.

We play a 2nd game.

We play a 3rd game.

An hour later ----- we are still playing. All the relatives are gathered in the gym ----- watching this “young buck”
beat his uncle into the ground. I’m not going to admit how tired I am.

Later ----- he’s on his way back to Virginia ... I’m on my way to the hot – tub.

Monday morning I go to “Dick’s” ----- I buy Westin a brand-new leather basketball ... and send it (fully inflated)
to his home. Three days later ... I get the warmest “thank-you” call from my nephew.

I look back on that day ... and I realize: Sunday, in the gym, wasn’t just about “basketball.”

Westin wanted someone to notice him ... to care about him ... to BELIEVE IN HIM.

B-ball is his passion ... he loves it ... he’s good at it ... it’s a part of who he is.

Most all ----- as an 8th grader (which can be a tough time) ... he needs to know he’s special ... and --- HE IS!!

The other day I see a young man’s mom in a local store.

The young man is serving a 20+ year sentence in a federal prison. I’ve known the family for a long time.

I say to the mom ----- “I just got a note from your son. Included in the note is a check for our church ... to use
In our out-reach program.”

I see the tears in her eyes.

I say ----- “You know why your son does something special like this???? It’s because you never have,
and you never will STOP BELIEVING IN HIM.”

Yes, Jesus lives today ...

In all those who refuse *not to believe*.

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