

Sermon: January 8, 2012
“#44 ----- and the moon”

It was 10 years ago Christmas ... 36 years old ... when he was first diagnosed with cancer. It hit a lot of us pretty hard. Scott spent a lot of years ... growing up here. Confirmed here ... in the youth group ... even served on our church council.

Even tho' he's younger and stronger than I am ... we used to have some EPIC BATTLES on the basketball court. There we weren't pastor and student ----- just 2 human beings, loving to compete. This is way before my soft (“it's how you play the game ... not whether you win or lose ...”) days. Then ---- all that mattered was WINNING!!

Shortly after Jude was diagnosed with cancer ... I remember a conversation the two of them had ---- just outside the front door of the church.

Scott has a picture of Russell Crowe as the “GLADIATOR” in his room. Each day, he shares with Jude ... when he gets up ... he looks at the picture and tells himself: “TODAY ... I AM A GLADIATOR!!” It gives him the strength to face yet one more day in his journey.

He's been to hell-and-back over the past 10 years. He's also been to heaven and back. He has a very loving family ... a supportive church in Downers Grove ... tons of friends ... a very caring mom (her initials are “Jan Mitchell”) ... and even “strangers” like many of you who pray and care and pray some more.

I've thought a lot about “life” over the past few weeks how can one not, as we celebrate the birth of the Christ-child!@!??? I think of those of you have suffered through the loss of one of your children over the past year. I think of Rocky and his mom ----- reminding us of how ONE MOMENT IN TIME can change your life and your family's life forever.

This morning ... I come here to open-up with my wonder dog GUNDER. Now, I'm a “sunrise guy” ... but this morning I am bowled-over by the MOON. Did you see it? ... so big, bursting with color.

I'm thinking ...

This is the same moon they see in Afghanistan.

It's the same moon shining in the Englewood neighborhood in Chicago.

It's Scott Mitchell's moon ... Rocky's moon ... yours and mine ...

The sun and the moon are reminders: we are only here for a short period of time ... we are only “guests” on this planet. I may own a house ... have a couple cars. I have a job. I have “stuff.”

BUT ----- **this is our world together.**

Blacks and browns and reds and whites.

Lutherans and Hindus and agnostics.

The rich and the poor ... the young and the old ...
from Africa to Lithuania to Tinley Park and “down-under” ...

Yes we are guests of this majestic world. We owe it to ourselves ... to each other ... to the good Lord ... to those whose journey has been rough and hard ----- yes, we need to give ... and love ... and share the very best we have. All of us are called to reach-out and fill the “love bucket of life.”

There is way too much selfishness out there ... way too much ridiculous competition ... way too much trying to get our own way ... way too much silly religion ...

So, I'm talking to #44 on the phone yesterday ---- the “gladiator.” Scott talks ... with a quiet strength ...
“Don, I am a gladiator ... I've fought hard ... I've battled this disease for 10 years ...”

I'm thinking of the message in 2 Timothy:
"I've fought the good fight ... I've run the distance ... I have kept the faith ..."

Scott continues ... *"Don ... it's time to let go. I'm ready."*

I think of those words: **"LETTING GO."**

It takes *guts* to let go.

"Letting go" is not about giving-up. It's about living ... and dying ... and the journey in between.

It's about allowing your spirit & God's spirit to come together.

It's about HOLDING ON to what is most precious in life ----- your own soul, your own spirit,
your own unique heart-song.

In "letting go" ... you become a "spiritual Gladiator" ...

Rather than fighting something you can't control ... you fight for the very essence of who you are.

You release the beauty of who you are ----- into a power and a realm that speaks of sunrises,
sunsets, and full moons.

Life can be so full of magic.

I'm discovering and re-discovering more and more ----- the Christ child, the humility of a carpenter,
just the journeys of ordinary folks like us ... the journey of a "humble hero" like Rocky ...

#44 ... a junior high wrestling coach, who (out of his own pocket, without anyone knowing) buys shoes for the
kids who can't afford it ... a fourth grader who asks me if it's ok if she can have her own offering envelopes ...

a \$100 bill on my desk, with no name ... just the words ---- "give this to someone who needs it more than
I do" ... a person in my life, who is only happy when those she loves is happy ...

YES ----- it's in moments & people & places like these that we discover that majesty and unexpected
goodness of God's spirit.

I know ... as you do ---- life is full of pain.

Unpredictability and unfairness can hit any of us ... at any time.

But ... WE NEVER FACE IT ALONE.

And ... when the time comes for us to say "good-bye" ... we leave behind the most important gift of all:

our heartsong,

and our spirit.

*It's ironic ... I was reflecting on all this Thursday night ... just before worship ... I heard the fax machine ...
and this is what I found. Not sure where it comes from ... but I'd like to share it ...*

"Death is nothing at all"

Death is nothing at all. I have only slipped away into the next room. I am I, and you are you. Whatever we were to each other, still remains. Call me by my old familiar name. Speak to me in the easy way which you always have --- put no difference in your tone. Use no forced air of sorrow or sadness. Laugh as we always laughed, at the little jokes we enjoyed together. Pray, smile, think of me, pray for me, and pray for yourself. Let my name be ever the household word that it always was. Let it be spoken without effort, without the trace of any shadow. Life means all that it ever meant, it is the same as it ever was. There is unbroken continuity. Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight? I am waiting for you somewhere very near, just around the corner. All is well.

