

## Opening

- It's March; and that means that March Madness is here.
  - The NCAA basketball tournament will soon begin and college teams from all across the country are now battling, to see who is going to the big dance.
  - Before you know it, we'll be watching teams progress through the brackets to reach the Sweet Sixteen, the Elite Eight, the Final Four, and then the National Championship Game.
  - It's exciting and I love it!
- When you think about it, in more ways than just basketball, there is March Madness in our lives- in ways we don't hold as fondly and which aren't as exciting.
  - Later this month will mark the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary, when our nation entered the war against terrorism, entering the Iraq War
    - And 15 years later, it still goes on, with over 5,000 U.S. soldiers still in Iraq and with expanded war on terror operations in close to a dozen other nations in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa.
  - **Russia flexed its muscles this week**, when it unveiled new "invincible" nuclear weapons, capable of striking the U.S. homeland.
    - Russian President Putin boasted of this capability, by playing a computer simulation, showing missiles raining down on the State of Florida.
- **Here at home**, we have plenty of chaos and madness going on.
  - **The gun debate has reached an epic level**, where passions on both sides have understandably raised the heat level of the discussion.
  - **The funeral for Billy Graham** was held this week.
    - Graham was a long-time spiritual leader in our country- a pastor to presidents who brought millions to Christ and his passing marks an ending.
    - His passing is a striking illustration of how much the country has changed during his long life.
    - America has become a much more diverse and divided country.

- And it seems no religious figure remains who can command harmony the way Graham did.
- **I won't even delve on politics**, other than to say our country has never been more divided in my lifetime.
- We in this country have experienced and continue to experience chaos, instability, strife and insecurity, that extends well beyond March.
  - And for many, our very sense of well-being has been shaken.
  - Indeed, this era of time, is a time of March Madness, for us all.
    - It can leave one questioning what the answers are to so many problems.

## **KU Basketball Basics**

- Last weekend, the Kansas Jayhawks won their 14 consecutive Big 12 Conference Championship.
  - And with this championship, they surpassed UCLA and now own the record for most consecutive conference championships.
    - They have more than any other college team in history.
  - I don't know if you caught the game last weekend, against Texas Tech, which sealed the championship for the Jayhawks.
    - It was an amazing contest- an extremely close game from beginning to end.
    - With two minutes to go in the contest and the game tied at 68 to 68, the Jayhawks were all huddled up, listening to their coach Bill Self.
    - Coach Self gave the players a simple, direct and straightforward talk about how to win.
      - He said "And now it's time for players to make plays."
    - With those words, Self was taking his team back to the basics.
      - He was saying it's time to do what they have practiced all year.
      - It was time to block out and get rebounds.
      - It was time to play team defense and stop the opponent.
      - It was time to contain them and block shots.
      - It was time to take good shots and finish the basket.
  - That's the basics in basketball.
    - And that's what the Jayhawks did.

- They exhibited better basics down the stretch and escaped with a win.
- Now, more of my savings have been spent to fund degrees from K-State than at KU, but I have to admire the results they've achieved by practicing the basics.

## Christian Basics

- For Christians, the “basics” don't get any more basic than the Ten Commandments.
  - It is a tradition of the church to read the Ten Commandments on this particular Sunday in Lent.
  - Unlike much of the scripture we read, The Ten Commandments are simple, direct, and straightforward.
  - They don't argue or reason.
    - They simply state. You don't kill. You don't steal.
- The people of Israel were wandering in the wilderness.
  - They were confused and their lives were in chaos.
  - They were experiencing their own kind of March Madness.
  - They needed some direct, simple, straightforward talk about the way things are in the world.
    - They needed to get back to basics.
    - And God loved them enough to teach them the basics, to show them the way.
    - That's the Ten Commandments- God's straightforward explanation of the facts of life.
    - This is the way that leads to life.
    - These are God's “basics.”
- Every Sunday we read from the Hebrew scriptures, which we usually call the Old Testament.
  - It is from these scriptures that we first learned of a God of love, a God who reaches into history and calls people to work God's will.
  - The Ten Commandments, which we read a bit ago, are not a set of harshly imposed, unrealistic divine demands.
    - They are God's gift to show us the way.
    - What we call “the law,” Israel called “Torah” and Torah means literally “the way,” or perhaps even more literally “the finger pointing the way.”

- These laws are not the opposite of God's grace, they are tangible, continuing proof of God's grace.
  - These laws are not an unfair, restrictive limitation of the good life, they are the steps that lead to the good life.
    - They are, in themselves, a gift of God, which is the very definition of "grace."
    - We are not left by God to wander, to discover on our own, the way of life.
    - God graciously shows us the way- points the way to life- through these Ten Commandments.
  - Sad, chaotic, confused and insecure lives are the result of life lived on our own.
    - Of living by our wits rather than by the wisdom of God.
    - Through the Ten Commandments, God reveals to us the structure of reality- the way the world works, so that we don't have to find that out by ourselves the hard way.
    - God shows us that this is really the way that we are meant to walk.
    - Here, in these commandments, is a description of the people we were created to be.

### **Living by the Commandments**

- Christians are people who try to live by the Ten Commandments.
  - And yet, the commandments are not so much a way of living our lives in a correct manner, as they are our way of worshiping a righteous God.
    - We give glory to God- through our obedience to the commandments of God- in our daily lives.
    - When a young ruler once asked Jesus about the way to eternal life, Jesus told the young man to obey all the commandments and more.
  - Jesus didn't come to change the law, but to fulfill it.
    - Jesus believed in the basics- and he believed in getting back to basics.
  - This is why in today's story from the gospel of John he became angry and drove the sellers of merchandise and the moneychangers out of the temple.
  - Jesus didn't want anything to interfere with the basics- the worship of God- and following God's way.

- And when Jesus entered the Temple and saw cattle and sheep in his father's house...
- And when saw that the money-changers had turned his father's house into a marketplace...
- Do you think he saw people loving God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength?
- No, he saw people who had lost their way.

## Wrap it up

- Faithfulness is our way to happiness.
  - I am reminded of that each day, in my marriage of 38 years.
  - In my marriage, I've learned to start each day, remembering how many years I've been married, just in case I get asked.
  - I've also learned that keeping my marriage vows is not a limitation on my life, but a way to live, which brings happiness.
- Faithfulness makes us happy.
- Peacefulness, honesty in our dealings with others, honoring our elders, not taking what is not ours- these are the means of happiness.
  - As we struggle with our own March Madness, in the midst of today's chaos, with the world in turmoil, maybe it is time for us to get back to basics.
    - Maybe it's time to once again hear simple, direct, straightforward talk about the way that leads to life.
    - And then to worship God by following that way.
  - Faithfulness can restore our balance and our sense of well-being.
  - Faithfulness can make us happy.
  - If we get back to basics, we can have hope.
- And by the grace of God, it's not too late to get back to basics.
- This morning, as we approach the table of Grace, offered by a loving God, in remembrance of a loving Savior.
  - Perhaps there is no better time to get back to basics.
  - To honor God with our worship and to follow God's way.
- May it be so for us this day, and every day.
- Amen.