

YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES !

My wife, Diane, and I have this ONE issue, this PERPETUAL disagreement, which comes up EVERY year at this time. And quite frankly, I'm looking for ALLIES among you. Now, I hesitate to even bring it up, because EVERY time I DO, I find out just how RARE it is that people SHARE my views. I feel sometimes as if I'm standing ALONE against the WORLD on this issue. And the ISSUE... is DANDELIONS! I just LOVE dandelions! In fact, I'd be HAPPY to have a yard FULL of dandelions. And EVERY spring, I get SO EXCITED to see the first DANDELIONS in the yard! And my kids STILL pick me bouquets of DANDELIONS! I just LOVE those beautiful little flowers.

But then ALONG comes DIANE with her little dandelion KILLER, that little pointed TROWEL that DIGS them up by the roots. And EVERY year, she ARGUES with me to put fertilizer and WEED-KILLER on the lawn. And I TELL her: *You don't need fertilizer! Just let the dandelions GROW, let the lawn become all DANDELIONS because, EVEN when their not BLOSSOMING, their ALWAYS green and LUSH!* Friends, I just DON'T understand how people can spend ENDLESS sums of money, and SO much time and energy, trying to get RID of dandelions. But they DO! In my church back in SEEKONK, 2 churches ago, we had a neighbor, Bob Johnson, who would spend HOURS and hours in his yard, DIGGING up dandelions, one-by-one. WHAT a PAIN that must have been! But what's WORSE is that it was ALL for NAUGHT, because he lived next door to ME. And at THAT time, I was winning the BATTLE with Diane. We had the most BEAUTIFUL crop of dandelions you can IMAGINE! And I was so PROUD of it! And my kids were LITTLE back then, and I TAUGHT them WELL. We WAITED and watched EVERY DAY for our multitudes of dandelions to be TRANSFORMED into those beautiful little BALLS of PUFF. And then, we would go all around the yard picking them and going PUFF, PUFF, PUFF, sending dandelion seeds EVERYWHERE. And Bob Johnson used to HATE me for it, I swear it. And what's WORSE is that he was the Head TRUSTEE at church.

But in the last few years, DIANE has been winning the battle, or SO it APPEARS. But THAT'S the BEAUTY of dandelions, isn't it? They KEEP coming BACK, in SPITE of lawnmowers and chemicals, shovels and foul language! THESE hearty, little, abused and unappreciated FLOWERS are no SHRINKING VIOLETS, are they? And besides that, they're USEFUL! They're GOOD to eat and drink! Show me a CROCUS, or a TULIP, or a forsythia branch that you can use as SALAD greens, or in cooking, or as a base for WINE. IMAGINE: all THIS in ADDITION to being a very attractive YELLOW in the spring, and a very pretty GREEN even in times of DROUGHT. Yes, dandelions are the most AMAZING flowers!

You know: MAYBE they'd be more respectable if we called them HERBS, which they actually ARE, OR, if we called them *Lion's Teeth*, which is what the word MEANS in *French*. But, NO! WE call them WEEDS and TRY to get RID of them! But you HAVE to LOVE 'em, because they just KEEP coming BACK!

Well, when JESUS sowed the SEEDS of His KINGDOM on earth, it's quite possible that He intended for it to be as LOVELY and as FRAGILE as a Lady's Slipper, or a ROSE, or a LILY, or some OTHER flower that we might RESPECT more than dandelions. But I don't THINK so! I believe that for the FLOWERING forth of HIS kingdom, Jesus had in mind the DANDELION. After all, everything ABOUT dandelions, from their LONG tap-roots to their windborne SEEDS, is totally dedicated to just ONE PURPOSE: the propagation of the species. Literally ANYTHING, from the breath of a little child to the blast of a hurricane, will DISPERSE the seeds of a dandelion. And dandelion PLANTS will sprout and grow ANYWHERE and EVERYWHERE. And of course, the SEEDS themselves are HEARTY! Did you know that if eaten by a bird, a dandelion seed will literally MIGRATE thousands of miles, taking advantage of the FREE transportation, as well as the little PACKET of fertilizer at journey's end? Yes, the dandelion is the HEARTIEST flower there IS, and it SPREADS like WILDFIRE! SO to ME, it's JUST like the seeds of Christ's CHURCH, which had to overcome all kinds of hatred and persecution in order to GROW and THRIVE throughout the world. And LIKE dandelions, WE who are the disciples of Jesus Christ today are called to work HARD at CONTINUING to sow the seeds of God's Kingdom, spreading our faith and growing our church day after day after day, so that ONE day ALL people EVERYWHERE might KNOW and love CHRIST, and put their TRUST in Him.

Now, the OTHER thing about dandelions that always impresses me is how they are TRANSFORMED. When dandelions DIE, and ALL that's LEFT is a little ball of *PUFF*, they TRANSCEND their ties to the SOIL, and COME to LIFE in a whole NEW way. MOST flowers, of course, just WILT and their pedals FALL off. The rose and the lily might be more beautiful, and smell more sweetly, but the DANDELION becomes like a flower made of SPIRIT. And with the slightest BREEZE, its SEEDS FLY into the air and float through the heavens. And BY this wonderful freedom, they BIRTH new life WHEREVER they happen to FALL. Well friends, that's JUST like the Christian church ALL through history. You know: we don't LIVE in a CHRISTIAN world, or even a Christian COUNTRY! And the VALUES of THIS world are constantly trying to TRAMPLE and DESTROY the values of God's Kingdom. And when we're holding FAST to the VALUES of our FAITH and our LORD, which we're NOT very GOOD at doing, especially in OUR affluent, decadent culture -- but WHEN we DO hold fast to the values of our faith and Lord, the world DESPISES us! WE go, as Jesus said, like a SHEEP among WOLVES! And like JESUS, WE become a THREAT to the neatly-trimmed lifestyles of a people living in a WORLD of illusions. And we're a THREAT to them because we PREACH something very DIFFERENT from what the WORLD preaches. WE preach that in ORDER to have LIFE, we FIRST must DIE. *When we DIE, we LIVE!* And what I MEAN by that is that we must DIE to our ILLUSIONS. WHEN we are TRANSFORMED from an illusionary people into a REALISTIC and SPIRITUAL people, THEN and ONLY then, will we have LIFE, and have it in ALL its fullness.

Let me tell you what I mean. NEXT Sunday is *MOTHER'S DAY*, right? Well, how many of you MOTHERS can remember that time, shortly after the birth of your first child, when reality *SLAPPED* you in the face? Suddenly, this SCREAMING, unreasonable, selfish, diaper-messing little KID just **POPS** your NAÏVE and deeply-imbedded ILLUSIONS as a first-time mother. And all of a sudden, MOM has to *DIE* to her illusions of how much FUN and how EASY it will be to have a new BABY in the house. And instead, she HAS to accept LIFE as it REALLY is: that HER LIFE, from now on, will be FULL of SACRIFICE. And ONLY when she can ACCEPT this new REALITY will she come to KNOW the NEW life, the UNIQUE life, and the BEAUTIFUL life, that comes with being a MOTHER. Now, of course, the SAME can be said for DADS, but *Father's Day* is not HERE yet. No, there's NOTHING more rewarding than being a PARENT. But there's ALSO nothing more DIFFICULT and CHALLENGING.

Yes, the MESSAGE is SIMPLE: when we DIE to our ILLUSIONS, when we let GO of them, THEN we can truly LIVE! Our LIVES get transformed, and we find a NEW, DIFFERENT and deeply FULFILLING life. And in a nutshell, THAT is the message of our LORD and His gospel. And friends, WE live in a WORLD that **NEEDS** to HEAR it. I mean: WE hold some ILLUSIONS that we just HAVE to LET GO of, because they're DEADLY for us. For example, there is the illusion that our supply of natural resources is ENDLESS, and that Mother Earth can TAKE whatever ABUSE we GIVE her. Well, we have to DIE to that illusion and become good STEWARDS of God's creation, OR we are in for UNTOLD traumas! We ALSO have the ILLUSION that WAR and violence will someday bring PEACE to the earth. Consequently, we have recently come through a CENTURY that has SET an all-time RECORD for the MOST human beings killed in WAR during ANY century in history. Between 1900 and 2000, 175 MILLION people were KILLED in WAR. That's 200 DEATHS every HOUR for 100 years in WAR! As Jesus said: *Those who take UP the sword will DIE by the sword!* And in the 21st Century so far, we are on our WAY to setting a NEW record. WHY can't we see that *fighting fire with fire ONLY produces more ASHES?* Or what about the illusion that WHAT we DO as individuals does NOT affect the rest of the world. Did you know that EACH year, an estimated 130 pounds of food PER PERSON in the U.S. ends up in our landfills? In fact, with just our WASTED food, 49 million people in the world could be FED each and every year. And HOW many children in this world do you think DIE every year because of malnutrition? Well, the answer is 12 MILLION. Yes, these illusions are DEADLY! THEY are what SIN is ALL about, because they constantly SEPARATE us -- from one another, from GOD, from God's CREATION, and EVEN within ourselves. And THESE are just a COUPLE of our cultural illusions. There are MULTITUDES more! PLUS, we have our own PERSONAL illusions. Friends, don't you SEE? These ILLUSIONS keep us from truly LIVING! So INSTEAD, let's be like dandelions, or the FRUITS of the SPIRIT that St. Paul talks about. Let's **SPREAD** the seeds of GOD'S values, and therefore GOD'S kingdom, EVERYWHERE, so that we might CHANGE this world by helping people DIE to their illusions, and have LIFE it in ALL its fullness, just as Jesus promised. Yes, let's all be like the DANDELIONS. Amen.