

March 15, 2017

In the Interim . . .

In our country, Lent, the journey to the grand celebration of Easter, often parallels the journey to the national collegiate basketball championship. As we walk the “the way to the Cross,” we watch the “the road to the Final Four.” Sin and grace get mixed up with fouls and free throws. The assurance of pardon gets mixed up with single elimination.

As the games of the tournament are played, the media makes a production out of rankings and records. But the reality is that it really does not matter how a team is seeded going into a game. Ranking reflects how a team played in the regular season, and once the tournament begins, the regular season is history. What matters then are not season records but how the teams play after the season ends.

So every year I am warmed with emotion when the media shows the now 34-year-old film of N.C. State Coach Jim Valvano running madly around the court hugging each one of his players. The scene is 1983, and his 6th seeded Cinderella team has beaten the number 1 ranked Houston Cougars for the national championship. That win on the buzzer, putting the “Cardiac Pack” ahead of “Phi Slama Jama,” has been considered one of the greatest upsets in college basketball history.

The 1983 State team won 7 of their last 9 games after trailing with a minute left in each game. Ten years after the championship victory, just before his death to cancer, Valvano announced the formation of a foundation for cancer research. The motto of the foundation: "Don't give up. Don't ever give up."

Years later I had the privilege of serving as pastor to Dr. Henry VanSant after he retired from East Carolina University, where he was assistant football coach and then associate athletic director. Reflecting on his long career in football, Henry said he learned to measure his job as a coach years after the seasons ended. “My real joy has been to see what the players have done after graduation,” Henry said. “I remember players more for what they became than for what they did on the field.”

As you continue your journey through Lent, take this message with you: No matter what your record is from the past, God’s renewing and resurrecting hope is with you now. "Don't give up. Don't ever give up."

Blessed Lenten journey,
Wanda

