

The Road Less Traveled – August 25, 2017

I stopped by the Bearcat on the way home on Wednesday, and I have seldom seen the place more crowded. The line to check out stretched halfway down one of the aisles, and at first I could not figure out what the story was. Most perplexing was the fact that most of the people in line were empty-handed. Then I figured it out.

Powerball.

Wednesday night's Powerball jackpot was one of the largest in history, more than \$750 million. That was enough to entice even casual lottery gamblers to come out in droves to defy the one in 292.2 million of winning the big prize. But despite the odds, someone did win. A single winning ticket was sold at a convenience store in Chicopee, Mass., about 90 miles west of Boston.

So someone in Massachusetts woke up this morning very rich, his or her life changed forever. But that is where this story turns ugly. Massachusetts Lottery officials initially announced that the winning ticket was sold at a store in Watertown, Mass. That had scavengers combing the parking lot of the convenience store in the wee hours Thursday, hoping that a careless shopper had dropped the winning ticket. Later Thursday morning Lottery officials issued a correction, verifying that the winning ticket had been sold in Chicopee, though the store in Watertown did sell a \$1 million winner. The mistake was attributed to human error, and the head of the Massachusetts State Lottery took full responsibility.

That didn't satisfy outraged lottery players in Watertown, however, some of whom immediately demanded that the head of the Massachusetts Lottery be fired for the mistake. They argued that the mistake gave them false hope that they may have won the big prize. They didn't really say why they didn't simply check the numbers, which were reported accurately.

That bit of news was disturbing because it points to a trend that I have noticed over the past few years. We are becoming a people who seem to be devoid of grace.

From Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway mistakenly announcing *Moonlight* as the winner of the Oscar for Best Picture (it was actually *La La Land*) to Steve Harvey announcing the wrong winner for the Miss Universe Pageant, we've seen several high-profile botches of late. In nearly every case, Social Media exploded with insults and questions regarding intelligence and competence. I can't imagine how bad the celebrities who made the mistakes must have felt, but it didn't matter. The public was all too happy to pile on.

And it's not just those in the public eye, either. From botched newspaper headlines to a wrong date in a pamphlet promoting children's activities, our outrage seems to simmer right under the surface, and it bubbles up at the first sign of human fallibility. We have become unwilling to live with mistakes.

And that really is the issue, I think. At some point, we began confusing human infallibility with competence. And it is turning us into a people who walk around terrified of making a mistake, because it could easily cost us our jobs. The truth is we all make mistakes. Some of us are fortunate that most of our mistakes remain relatively private, but that's not always the case. The more connected we become

through texting and Social Media, the more our off-the-cuff comments and musings become fodder for an increasing larger audience. We are all only one typo away from public embarrassment.

And when it happens to me, my prayer is that people who know me would give me the benefit of the doubt. That people would begin with the assumption that the gaffe wasn't intentional or a result of incompetence, but rather human infallibility. I may strive to be perfect, but I'm pretty sure I'll never get there.

Jesus told those who would follow him to "Love your neighbor as yourself." There are a lot of layers to that, and it can mean a lot of different things. But surely it means that we are called to extend the same grace to others that we expect for ourselves. Come to think of it, it's the grace that God has already extended to us.

See you Sunday.