**A Good Word for Richard Weaver
February 18, 2012**

 As I sat in the middle of the house that he had built with his own hands and his own design, I watched as Richard’s family gathered and swarmed. His house was filled with warmth and laughter even in the midst of the terrible occasion for which they had gathered. And everyone there referred to someone named Rick. While one brother was off taking care of all the business that goes with death, another brother and a mother sat at a kitchen table and told me about the Rick they knew. They described to me the man who loved to hunt and fish. They told me about this man who was a great outdoorsman. They told me of a man who had 8 chickens that each had a name and would come running when he called. They told me of a man that picked up dogs and cats along the side of the road and took them in as his own. They told me of a man who would travel far and wide to hunt and then daily take a bucket to his back yard and call in the wildlife to feed them by hand and enjoy the beauty of his wild “pets.” Yes, he would bang on a feeding bucket and let the deer and the turkeys come and feed practically from his hand without even thinking of pulling out his gun and shooting them. I’ll have to be honest and say that I don’t think I understand hunters. He wasn’t calling them in to be sitting ducks. Rather he was enjoying all that comes with the great outdoors. And that brought him joy and delight.

 I sat at a kitchen table and listened to a brother and mother describe to me a man that loved his toys. Richard was one of those men who never really grew up – a kid at heart, they kept telling me. It’s just that his toys got bigger and more expensive. From four wheelers to old tractors to rebuild to car to restore to my personal favorite – he was a Harley rider. It’s my favorite because I too am a Harley rider. The only difference is that I ride on the back! But there is some kind of kinship, some kind of connection with folks that ride Harleys. Harley owners are doctors and lawyers and mechanics and school teachers and draftsmen and preachers. My husband was reminding me yesterday of a ride that he and Richard and a few others from our church took years ago in the mountains. One of those perfect days of the wind in your face riding your care away and enjoying the sights and smells along the way. Yes, kids at heart, all of them.

 I just wish I could have seen it the day that Richard put his mother on the back of that big HOG and took her for a ride. Just sitting at that table and watching her smile as she told his stories made me wonder if he got his kid at heart way of living from her! She recalled that when he had horses he gotten a buggy too. And for its maiden voyage, she got the first buggy ride. And I don’t mean the first time Richard took a passenger. I mean the first time those horses were strapped to that buggy, Richard put his mother in the buggy with him and off they went. It sounds like everything went pretty well and she only threatened to jump out once! And he didn’t mind taking her on fierce four wheel rides only being stopped from rushing her through the river because of a downed tree! And it wasn’t just his mother that got this fun country living adventure treatment. Nieces and nephews, brothers and cousins – all enjoyed coming to this wonderland of nature’s adventure that Richard created. A get away from big city living, a respite of the great outdoors, an oasis of a break from the routine, Richard made for himself and his family and friends a place he called home and many others simply called fun. Surrounded by God’s creation, Richard built a place where he could live out his loves of being that big kid at heart.

 As we sat at that kitchen table, I heard a brother and mother tell of how Richard would do anything for anyone and then not ask for help himself. And he seemed to like to figure things out. Just this past Thanksgiving, he went to visit his mother in Texas and retiled her vanity top. And then she had other jobs to be done. And Richard had just called her recently to say that he had finally figured out how to do the next thing she needed and he would be back this spring to get it done.

 As I sat as his kitchen table and listened to a mother and brother, I learned that Richard was a big teaser. I was told that everyone knew to never be within about 10 feet of a swimming pool if they didn’t want to take a plunge because Richard would be sure to push anyone in – clothes and all! They recounted story after story that had that same teasing sense. Like the time that Richard took his beloved dog Opie to Home Depot. When the nice young lady noted for him that no dogs were allowed, Richard to her it was his seeing eye dog. And you guessed is, Richard and Opie charmed their way into the store.

 And Richard was known around the church for many years of getting and putting up the huge Chrismon Tree and

 I think he would have really enjoyed yesterday. His house filled with family – young and old – telling old, old stories of crazy times and sharing laughs and memories of years gone by. He had so many special relationships with this large family of his. That special bond with his brother Mark, though neither Richard or Mark let any disabilities stand in the way of four-wheeling! He could make Mark laugh like no other and after the big hurricane damage years ago, he put Mark to work cleaning up the place. In the moments like that, Richard was intent on living life to the fullest. But there is never enough time and rarely are any of us ready for death, but certainly Friday a week ago Richard had not anticipated that day being his last. Always one to count the safety cost, Richard simply did what he loved to do – work and piddle around the place that he loved and called home. And one limb colliding with one ladder can change anything in one split second.

 Everyone has their own Richard, or Rick, stories to tell. And everyone’s story would have its own funny, teasing twist. Here’s mine: the day that I met Richard Weaver he was working in my house. My house that I had not even moved into yet. It was Halloween night of 2000. My family had just moved to Charlotte so that my husband and I could pastor Park Road Baptist Church. We had bought a house that I felt needed some walls knocked out because that’s just what I like to do – knock out walls. I had taken our small children trick or treating while my husband and some men from the church proceeded to knock out a wall. And then my cell phone rang. It was my husband saying that I’d better come home and take a look. They had started knocking out the wall and on second look, the wall that they had sworn was not load bearing . . . well, maybe they had been wrong. They thought, now that the top half of most of the wall was missing, that maybe, just maybe one side of the wall was not loading bearing, but maybe, just maybe the other side was. Oops. My husband wanted to know how I would feel about just taking out the top part of the wall and leaving the bottom half as a modesty wall. Well, I didn’t think I was going to feel too good about that, so we cut the trick or treating short to head home and see how bad it looked. When I stepped through the door and into the partial demolition, Richard stuck out his hand to me and said, “Hi. My name is John.” You see, he didn’t want Richard Weaver to ever be associated with this fax paux. And being so new town and meeting so many new people, I was for years confused about who he was – was his name Richard or John. And we never saw each other that I didn’t call him John and we would laugh and remember the night that he tried to tear down my house. As I recalled that story this week, I thought about that name he gave me – John. In Scripture, John is often referred to as the disciple “whom Jesus loved.” No other disciple is ever referred to that way. *The one whom Jesus loved.* And that seems fitting to me today – Richard Weaver, or John as I knew him, is indeed a Beloved Child of God. For that kid at heart, teddy bear, outdoorsman that loved to laugh and tease and play, thanks be to God.