

“WAITING FOR PUNXSUTAWNEY PHIL”
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What will you be doing on Monday, February 2nd? Most likely, you have not given that much thought. It's not like planning for December 25th or January 1st. There are some days that stand out and require advance planning. Believe it or not, February 2nd will be a very important day for the people who live in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. This little town hosts the most famous Groundhog Day celebration in the country. Every year, on the second day of February, countless television crews come to Punxsutawney to record the festivities.

On this day, according to folk tradition, if a groundhog sees its shadow and retreats back into its burrow, winter will continue for six more weeks. If the groundhog, however, does not see its shadow, winter will soon end. The country's most famous groundhog is clearly Punxsutawney Phil. Millions watch him on television every February second to see what his "weather prediction" will be.

Of course, Punxsutawney Phil is not the only groundhog who is watched on this day in February. Other towns offer up their own star: Balzac Billy, Dunkirk Dave, Holtsville Hal, Buckeye Chuck, or Malverne Mel. It turns out that Phil is only one of many large rodents who are closely watched that day.

What should we make of all of this fuss over Groundhog Day? The National Climatic Data Center recently studied the overall prediction accuracy of these famous animals. They concluded that these furry creatures were correct 39% of the time. It would be wise to put these predictions in the category of good-natured fun rather than reliable fact.

Whenever I muse about the events surrounding February 2nd, I remember the words of advice that Jesus gave to his followers, "I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be as wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16). Not everything that we see in the world is to be accepted at face-value. Not everything is genuine or authentic. It's one thing to have a good sense of humor and laugh at some of our folk customs. It's quite another thing to blindly accept everything we see or hear as truth. All of us need to develop a good sense of discernment. It's fun to watch all of the ceremony surrounding Punxsutawney Phil each February 2nd. Let's be "as wise as serpents and innocent as doves."

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