

Is This Thing On?

Messages from the
Desert Ministries
Radio Hour



Lori Towne



I never intended to write a book.

Well, that's not exactly true. I always wanted to write one. I even asked the Lord for material about which to write. Something that might help someone.

He heard me. But He answered me in a way I didn't expect. Back when I first asked Him for help in writing, I was trying to write a novel – four novels, actually, all at once. I even made it to 400 pages on one. But they all went nowhere.

Thank You, Lord.

These days, I write the “story” for the Desert Ministries Radio Hour, for which, by some miracle, I also serve as co-host. Paul Falkowski, Desert Ministries founder and director – and now a dear friend – decided to take my appearance in his office as a divine appointment. I arrived as a potential volunteer visitor, and left as a writer for and the new co-host of the live, hour-long program. Me, with a microphone. Me, a writer who writes because she is more comfortable with the written word than the spoken word.

The Lord obviously had His own ideas. He's had me both writing and speaking the Word every Saturday for nearly three years.

Thank You, Lord.

The material in this book was written with a “mature” audience in mind – but not in the typical sense of that word. Every week, I ask the Lord to tell me what people bound by age and illness need to hear. His answers encompass our elders, but they also apply to anyone who struggles with what the world has handed them.

In these pages, I hope that you will find the encouragement that I endeavor to instill in our weekly programs. When several listeners asked for copies of my radio stories, I was touched. I set out to respond to their requests – and ended up with something I never intended to write: a book.

Thank You, Lord.



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Please feel free to share these stories. A large-print version of this book is also available at www.desertministries.org. For more information about Desert Ministries, please visit our web site, call (402) 556-8032 or write to P.O. Box 4704, Omaha, NE 68104.

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God Is Our Loving Father

A couple things have been on my mind since last week.

Last week, as I looked out into the audience, I didn't see wheelchairs or broken bodies, as some might expect. I saw children of God, miracles of God, people full of life but perhaps unable to fully express it.

There was one woman in the front, whose beautiful smile touched my heart. When I approached her and asked her questions, I realized that she could hear and understand me, but she had lost the ability to clearly communicate. As I think back on that, I think about the mute people that Jesus healed. They couldn't ask out loud for healing, yet they received it, through their silently expressed faith. I think of the woman with the issue of blood, who crawled through the crowd to touch Jesus, saying only to herself, "If I but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be healed." No one heard her. Yet she was healed.

Isaiah 65:24 reads: "And it shall be that before they call I will answer; and while they are yet speaking I will hear." Jesus, in Matthew 6, says, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him."

We do not need to speak for God to hear us, or to see us. He sees us as we are; He knows our hearts. He doesn't see us with physical eyes. When He looks at us, He does not see broken bodies, for we are not bodies; we are spirits, *in* bodies. We can see people as God sees them, if we look with our hearts.

How does God see us? We feel imperfect, flawed, sometimes downright unworthy. He sees us as we see our own children. Do you remember holding your baby in your arms? Perhaps he or she was crying, hungry or tired. Wouldn't you have done anything you could to soothe it? Perhaps it was sleeping in your arms, looking as peaceful as an angel. Didn't love well up inside you, a love unlike any other, a deep sense of the beauty you were beholding? Perhaps your baby was lying in your arms, looking small and helpless. Wouldn't you have done anything your could to protect her?

The love of our Lord is the same. He looks at us as children, His children, His precious children. Wouldn't you have gone through fire for your children? The Lord would do that for you. He did that for you. He met the fires of hell and went through them. He defeated them. For you. "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matt. 7:11)

God is called many things. Of all the names Jesus could have used, He said "Father" more often than anything. This is how He wants us to think of Him, as our loving Father.



7-26-03

Tired of the Battle? Be Still and Know That He is God

On Wednesday night, I sat down on my kitchen floor, and cradled my head on my knees. "Is this what it has come to?"

"Lord, I don't have the words. I don't know what to pray for or pray against. I'm tired of the battle."

I'd had a conversation over dinner with my 16-year-old son, who professed that he wanted to depend only on himself and on logic, not on God. "Lean not on your own understanding," I wanted to tell him. I don't know if it was just teenage rebellion or natural

questioning, or if it was something more – the feeling that God had let him down. Maybe it was easier for him to rely on himself and his own reasoning than to believe in a God who could “let” him be sick, who could create him with genes that betrayed him. Perhaps he felt abandoned. Alone in his own struggles. He’s had many.

I prayed that the Holy Spirit would keep leading him and talking to him. I tried to tell him that I would do anything to help him; how much more did God want to help him? “How do you know what God would do?” he asked.

I came home to find a letter waiting for me. A rejection letter. I’d submitted a client’s book to a leading bookseller to be considered for national distribution. Their letter questioned the book’s professionalism, and I began to question myself. What had I been doing all these years? What was the truth and what was the lie? Was I good and they just didn’t know it, or had I been fooled all these years and I shouldn’t be doing this? What did the awards on my wall mean? Was it my client’s writing that was lacking? The illustrator’s drawings? What was the truth? Did it all come down to one letter, and one paragraph in that letter? Did my worth really come down to one paragraph from someone I didn’t even know but whom I’d accepted as my judge?

Three years ago, I began an odyssey into illness that kept me in pain and in bed for nearly two years. Up until that time, I had been driven. I had been ambitious. It’s not that I don’t care now. I do. It’s just that I discovered during that time, that while a lot of things didn’t get done without me, my worth didn’t depend on what I could accomplish. The value of my life didn’t stem from my productivity. I was alive. I understood the precious value in simply being alive.

While we are on this earth, we are called to contribute. And we might be led to emulate the Creator, by creating. I thrive on being creative. But we will never achieve perfection by our own hands. And we cannot define ourselves by how productive we are. Do we no longer matter, if we find ourselves stilled, or quieted, because our bodies have rebelled and slowed us or even stopped us? Yes, we matter. Because what matters is relationship. What matters is love. God created us for relationship with Him, and with others. “How do you know what God would do?” my son asked. I know, because I know God. I know He is Love. He will never leave you, nor forsake you. (Joshua 1:5, Heb. 13:5) And He will give you something that the world, that being productive, that being good at something, can never give. “Peace I give to you, and not as the world gives.” (John 14:27)

Yes, be “stilled.” Be still, and know that He is God. (Psalm 46:10) Close your eyes, and open your heart, and you will know that His presence is enough. It is more than enough.



8-2-03

Lord, Remind Me of the Heat

Boy, it’s been hot lately, hasn’t it?

I was standing on the asphalt in a parking lot one day last week, and I turned to a friend who was with me. “Remind me of this when it’s freezing cold, in the middle of next winter, when heat like this would be welcome.”

In Nebraska, we get extremes. It’s not that we’re born complainers, it’s just that the weather can be so cold or so hot. Either way, it can be miserable. Even when it’s not frigid, the skies can be gray and depressing. In the summer, even when it’s not horribly hot, the air can be so humid that it’s oppressive. We look forward to the spring and the fall, when the weather changes into something moderate and tolerable. Ask many Nebraskans what their favorite season is, and it’s not surprising that many choose – shall I dare say it? – Nebraska football season.

Well, that’s fall by any name. That’s when the fields get harvested, and the effort and patience of farmers start to pay off – assuming we’ve gotten the moisture we needed, and have avoided hailstorms, and the prices are good . . . I lived on a farm for years. I know

what goes into that lifestyle. I know the precarious balancing act that one does to stay in that business.

So, fall is a time that many look forward to. You get the crop in and see what you have. For me, it was usually a time of dread – not because of that season, but because of the one that follows it. Fall means winter is on its way. I don't like the cold, and I don't like the isolation that can come with the winter. It can be downright scary, feeling that alone and vulnerable. When I get cold, my whole body trembles, and I lose feeling in about half of my fingertips, due to carpal tunnel syndrome. I don't like being reminded how fragile life is. The cold makes me think of that. It makes me feel that.

I've always had this fantasy of moving to California, so I'd never have to get that cold again on a regular basis. Well, I'm 43, and I'm still here. I have to learn to cope – and not to fear the cold. It's not going away, so I have to adjust to it.

Now, adjusting to it does not mean that I like it or bow to it. It means that I refuse to fear it. I think of the cold, and my dread of it, as similar to the attacks that come against us in life. How we respond determines to a large extent how we cope with them. Can I eliminate the seasons? Or do I hide from them, by staying inside? Perhaps, but that would keep me isolated and away from people, and from life. When it's cold, do I put on some more clothes, to keep me warm? And turn up the furnace?

It's hard to think about turning on the furnace in weather like this, when the air outside is something like a furnace. But the days where we put on extra clothes and turn on the furnace are coming. And to make an analogy with life, the days where we are threatened with isolation and loneliness, with cold and trouble, do come. It's very likely that we will have to fight loneliness like the isolation that comes with bad weather, that will have to fight feeling oppressed by life as if by humidity, that will have to fight depression like the gray skies that don't seem to go away.

Many would say that these things are inevitable results of getting older, as inevitable as the changing of the seasons. Maybe we won't be able to change the weather, or the possibility of facing cold and loneliness. But God is not the author of these hardships, these spiritual, mental or physical winters. And He certainly does not want us to fear these challenges, either in the fall or the winter of our lives, and He does not want us to stand unprotected against them. We have some warm clothes to put on. We have the full armor of God to protect us from the cold. We have His Word like a furnace to energize us. He gave us these weapons because He knew we would face our own winters – attacks of loneliness, isolation, depression.

My prayer? Lord, remind me of the heat when I get cold. Remind me that I can bring some warmth and light to cold and gray skies. Remind us all that we can change someone else's winter into a new and different season, and make their fall an expectant time of harvest, instead of a time of dread for what lies ahead.



8-9-03

"I Don't Know You"

"I'm sorry, but I don't know who you are," the woman said to me.

She had been sleeping, and I woke her up. I took her by surprise. She had fallen asleep during our radio hour, shortly before I was to interview her. She was 100 years old; we wanted people to hear her voice over the airwaves.

"I'm with the Desert Ministries Radio Hour," I told her. That didn't help clear things up. She was groggy. I know the feeling. When I wake up after an afternoon nap, I sometimes don't know what time it is or how long I've been sleeping. "I kind of sneaked up on you, didn't I? I'm sorry."

She had a beautiful face, one that belied her age. She spoke clearly. She just didn't know who I was. How could she? She'd never seen me before, and here I was, kneeling presumptuously before her, holding a microphone to her mouth! Had I ever done a thing—

for her? Had I helped take care of her? Had I visited her before?

She had every right to tell me to leave her alone, but she was gracious. I talked to her for a few more minutes, about where she was raised, about her family. I can't remember much of the conversation, to be honest. I was just hoping I could help her get her bearings and overcome the fact that she didn't know me.

For some reason, her words stayed with me. "I don't know you." I heard them again the next day, during a meeting. It wasn't until a few days later that I realized I'd heard those words before. "I don't know you." The Lord had said this, hadn't He?

In Matthew, Chapter 7, Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

How could this be? I'd always wondered. If we called on His name, didn't that mean that we believe? And isn't believing enough? How could Jesus say He didn't know us, when we knew to use His name?

The clue is found in 1 Corinthians. Paul says, "And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commands . . . The person who has My commands and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and whoever loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will show Myself to him . . . This is My commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you . . ." (John 14)

There is power in His name, for He is Lord of all. Yet even the demons know that. Even the demons believe. They flee at the sound of His name. But they do not know Jesus.

He who does the will of the Father, who keeps Jesus' command to love one another, who acts in love and not for his own sake or his own glory, to him is Jesus revealed. "I will show Myself to him." (John 14:21)

"Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'" (Matt. 25)

Look into the face of someone who needs love. Whose face do you see? Do you recognize it? Do you know this beautiful Person? Does He know you?

Or will you stand with a microphone, all eyes on you, and hear, "I don't know who you are"?



8-23-03

A Living Dog is Better than a Dead Lion

Every week, before I attempt to write anything to be read on the air, I pray. I ask, “Lord, what do they need to hear? What do You want me to tell them?”

This week, I could hear very little. That’s because “worry” was shouting at me. And I have a hard time hearing God over worry.

I ended up getting a horrible headache, then digestive problems, probably because of all the tension I’d been fighting. That’s because I was fighting the worries, instead of resting on and resting in God’s Word. I think of it as weeding a garden without planting anything to grow there. I can’t just pull weeds of fear; I also need to plant thoughts of peace and hope; I need to plant God’s promises in my heart.

Fear operates in the heart, in the soul, but it can enter via your head, through your worried thoughts. The good thing is, faith can also enter your heart and your soul through your head. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing, by the Word of God.” (Romans 10:17)

What were my worries? It doesn’t really matter. Worries can vary by circumstance. And I don’t want to be swayed by my circumstances. Proverbs 15:15 says, “All the days of the desponding and afflicted are made evil [by anxious thoughts and forebodings], but he who has a glad heart has a continual feast [regardless of circumstances].”

One of my aunts recently told me that it was a mother’s job to worry. Jesus, however, taught us not to worry. “Be anxious for nothing,” the Apostle Paul wrote. (Phil. 4:6) Nothing. Jesus said to “take no thought for the morrow.” (Matt. 6:34) He doesn’t tell us to do things we cannot do. That means it’s possible not to worry.

But how do we do it? The more responsible we feel and the less control we think we have, the more we worry. My youngest child doesn’t worry that his mother will forget to pack him a lunch; I’ve always provided for him. But I wonder how long I’ll be able to buy groceries to put into his lunch. The nice house I live in is not mine; my parents own it, because I cannot afford to house my children. My business has suffered during the last few years, and appearances would say that there’s little hope of things changing for the better.

I prayed against that headache, just as I prayed against my worries. Neither seemed to budge. I finally just asked the Lord to take away the pain as I slept. In any case, I decided I will not regard the pain, nor any appearance that runs counter to God’s promises. I will rejoice in my deliverance before I see it. My circumstances right now do not matter. The exact nature of my worries doesn’t really matter. Why? Because they are all vain imaginations that exalt themselves against the Word of God. (2 Corin. 10:5)

That doesn’t mean that I don’t care what’s bothering you, or that God doesn’t, or that you shouldn’t talk about it. But how are you talking about it? Are you telling yourself there’s no way out, or that you’re more than a conqueror? Are you saying that your children will never visit you, or are you asking God to send someone your way? Are you saying that you don’t have enough money, or are you declaring that the Lord meets your needs? Are you saying that you’re sick and there’s no hope of recovery, or are you reminding yourself of God’s Word, “I am the Lord that heals you”? (Exodus 15:26)

As for my worries, and the pain they caused, I should have reminded myself of God’s Word: “It is vain for you to rise up early, to take rest late, to eat the bread of [anxious] toil – for He gives [blessings] to His beloved in sleep.” (Psalm 127:2)

The Word of God counters the vain imaginations that exalt themselves against it, the things that say, “I’m bigger than God’s promises.” Can that really be true? Can Truth be untrue? “Let God be true and every man a liar.” Everything that fear would tell us, we can find a

promise that in faith we can claim. Everything that tries to whisper in our ear, we can counter with something God says.

I think of those vain imaginations as the dragon mentioned in Psalm 91. The dragon has always been a mythical figure. The writer of that psalm knew dragons don't exist – unless we create them in our mind. These are things that will never come to pass; haven't we all had worries about things that never came to pass? Isn't that the definition of worrying – being anxious about something that may never actually happen? It is the biblical dragon – Satan – who is more than pleased to plant those thoughts in your head.

We've all heard that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1) I like how the Amplified Version puts that verse in Hebrews: "Now faith is the assurance (the confirmation, the title deed) of the things [we] hope for, being the proof of things [we] do not see and the conviction of their reality [faith perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses]."

"Such hope," Romans 5:5 says, "never disappoints or deludes or shames us, for God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us."

Faith can enter your heart through your thoughts. But it cannot enter through your reasoning, through your senses. "Lean not unto your own understanding." (Prov. 3:5) Lean on God. Make Him responsible. It's His job. "Cast your cares upon the Lord." (1 Peter 5:7)

I, for one, will never retreat from His promises. I hold "title deed" of the things I hope for, of the deliverance I seek. Long illness, headache, financial troubles, personal losses? Dragons of worry? "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet." I can meditate on the worry, or I can meditate on the Word. I know my choice. I will continue in hope. As Ecclesiastes Chapter 9 says, amusingly, "But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion." (Eccles. 9:4)

Two final thoughts: my headache went away – as I slept. And I have a job interview on Monday. "Woof."



9-6-03

Butterfly Potential

As I mentioned the last time I spoke on the air, I always ask God what I should write about before I ever sit down to compose something for this show. For that matter, I always pray before I begin any creative task. *He* is the creative source, and without Him, I am dry bones.

Well, I asked that question, "What do You want me to write about?" on Tuesday night. I laughed when I heard the answer. "Butterflies." Butterflies? I'd been planning on writing something about joy. Okay, I guess I could see how butterflies might relate to feeling joyful, light as air, floating.

But that didn't seem like all there was to it. I wanted to know what the Word had to say. So I looked for Biblical references on butterflies. No luck. I'm sure there were references to locusts, but I didn't look those up.

"Butterflies?" I asked God. It seemed an odd word to get from God, but I knew I had to be obedient. Being obedient in spite of oddness has taken me places I never could have imagined on my own. Some of the most important things, people and moments in my life have come to me because I just obeyed His voice – without knowing exactly what He had in mind.

My own mind, and my own imagination, limit me. I'm pretty creative, but my creativity is nothing like the Lord's. He "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think," or, as the Amplified puts it, He "is able to [carry out His purpose and] do superabundantly, far over and above all that we [dare] ask or think [infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, hopes,—

or dreams].” (Eph. 3:20) My imagination pales in comparison to the Lord’s.

I thought, and I tried to come up with something useful. Maybe I needed to talk about metamorphosis, or transformation, changing from one thing into another. Or maybe it was simply that someone needed to hear the word “butterfly” to confirm that God had heard their prayer.

I couldn’t imagine. So I just obeyed, and I prayed. “Well, Lord, if You want me to write about butterflies, You’d better tell me what to say!”

I didn’t hear His voice; I kept getting the same image over and over. I kept seeing the worm that is the butterfly. When you look at a butterfly, you can still see the caterpillar he once was. But now he’s more. He’s what he was born to be. The butterfly still has the caterpillar in him, but more important, the butterfly has always been inside the caterpillar. The potential to become a butterfly has always been there.

We are the same. We might have wormy bodies, but we are butterflies as well, butterflies in the making. How do we become butterflies? Must we wait for heaven to sprout wings and fly away? To be rid of these physical bodies? Yes, we look forward to the time when we can be free of the confinement of these decaying or belligerent bodies. It offers us great hope, when we are afflicted, to know that we will eventually leave this earth and become free of the restrictions of earthly bodies. No more fatigue, no more heartache, no more pain. “When we only get to heaven,” the old song goes, “oh what a day that will be.”

Yes, that is all true. But I am here to tell you that our wings dwell within us now. We already have our keys to freedom. We don’t have to wait to see heaven out of our bodies to see it here now. We can have the joy of the Lord, the lightness of the butterfly, right now. You might see the face or body of a worm when you look in the mirror, but you are already a butterfly. You just can’t see your wings yet.

When we become Christians, the old passes away and we become new creatures. We might die to our old selves, but we don’t have to wait for heaven to become what we were meant to be. The caterpillar does not die; it changes into something else. “He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” He will enter into eternal life. Not when he dies, but at the moment he accepts Christ. At that moment, he transforms, he becomes something more, he sprouts wings that will carry him away from death.

I’d meant to write about joy, and I heard “butterfly.” Are they so different? Is there anything that can bring so much joy as becoming what God intended us to be, what He made us to be, what He wrote on our hearts to become?



9-13-03

Keeping the Seed in the Ground

Ever been so tired that you can’t see straight?

This last month, I’ve been working 18-hour days, nearly every day. In my business, which is writing and graphic design, it’s usually feast or famine, as they say. This particular feast arrived in answer to prayer – or, more accurately, my proclamation of answers God has already given us. “The Lord will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you. The Lord will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways.”

That’s what the Word says. So I said, “Soon, I’m going to have so much work, I won’t know what to do with it all!” I was resting on God’s promises about planting seeds and waiting for them to grow. Planting in faith, then waiting in faith, which is not a small matter. I heard something funny recently about leaving seeds alone once we sow them. If we planted an actual seed in the ground, and didn’t see immediate results, we wouldn’t go dig it up to see if it was growing! We’d kill it, doing that! No, we wait in faith while

it grows, believing that the process will work on its own, without interference from us. We just keep watering it with our faith, acting on what we know to be true, by not taking it back into our own hands – by not digging it up.

I know the Word will not fail. It will produce what God intends. Isaiah 55 says, “For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10-11)

Because I was so tired, and so very busy, I wondered if I’d have time to write for this show today. Maybe I could call Paul and tell him I’d just read passages from the Psalms. I wasn’t sure that I could come up with anything lucid – as if my own efforts could really make that happen, anyway!

Earlier in the week, I’d decided to write about giving. My youngest son had asked why he wasn’t getting any mail. “You have to send mail to get mail,” I told him. That made me think about my recent sowing. I’d been planting seed, and planting the Word in my heart, and waiting for something to come up – or to show up in my mailbox!

“Give and it shall be given unto you,” the Word says. (Luke 6:38) That seems like a paradox, like “the last shall be first,” (Matt. 19:30) or “he who seeks to save his life shall lose it.” (Luke 17:33) I’d been giving, sowing into things, while not having many resources to do so. That was tough. It’s easier to give when you have plenty, or at least it should be. But we tend to hold onto the things we have, believing that’s the only way to keep them. We ask, “How can I give things away, when I have so little? How can I give time to people and even worthwhile ventures, when I have so little time and energy?”

Perhaps the cares of the world are pressing you down. Or maybe you’re sick, or tired, or weak. Or maybe you don’t feel qualified. You realize, as Acts 20 says, “that we ought to assist the weak, being mindful of the Lord Jesus, how He Himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35) You know that Jesus told us to “heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely you have received, freely give.” (Matt. 10:8) You want to give, but how can you?

I wanted to write something for today’s show, but how could I? Even working from 7 in the morning until 1 in the morning, I wasn’t getting everything done. And my mind was dragging. If I wrote something, would it make sense? Surely Paul – and the Lord – would understand if I couldn’t write this week. The growth of one “seed” was impinging on another’s.

Even in earthly terms, the Bible’s apparent paradoxes really do make sense. The verse I read earlier from John 12 also says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.” (John 12:24) A seed appears to die to produce grain. The thing is, it’s like a storehouse, waiting to be opened. When conditions are right for it to grow and thrive, the seed comes out of its dormancy.

“You have to send mail to get mail.” You have to be a friend to make a friend. You have to love to be loved, respect to be respected, be kind to receive kindness. What you want, you have to give away.

Yes, I was tired. I was spent. Yes, it’s hard to believe that God is taking care of my financial needs when things look so dry and barren. Yes, it seems hard even to do a small thing like visit someone. But I can guarantee you that you won’t even notice what you’ve “given away.” Somehow, you’re given more.

The Bible has nearly 1,500 references to giving – with God doing most of the giving! This is one I love, from Luke, for it tells us what God will do with our gifts. It tells us how our hearts will be filled when we give them away: “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.” (Luke 6:38)

I look at the happy faces of the people I've offered to "help," and what I see is the Lord, smiling at me. I came to love and bless, and I'm the one being loved and blessed. I was tired, and short of time, and I can tell you, "most assuredly," I feel like I could stay in this place all day. "He will bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you."



10-25-03

What Would Jesus Have Us Do?

I was looking for a certain passage in Deuteronomy this morning. I knew the words but I wanted the whole context. As I searched the book, it really struck me how unfriendly it is. Downright scary. All the things that could come upon us if we don't dwell with the Lord! And it's not because the Lord seeks to punish us for wrongdoing. It's that when we open our hearts to evil, evil has its way with us. I said something like this about a woman I met last week, who claimed to be a medium, to be in communication with spirits. After praying for her, I told a friend, "If she's in contact with spirits, they're in contact with her. They're having their way with her."

The book of Deuteronomy lists laws that we are to keep, and the consequences of not keeping them. Many people think these laws prescribe God's judgment on us, and hence see Him as harsh. But these are really natural laws, natural consequences. If you pull a flower up from the roots, would you really expect it to live? If you pull yourself away from God, the source of life, would you expect to live? If you seek evil, if you practice evil, would you expect to be protected from evil? Moses tells his people, "I call heaven and earth to witness this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, the blessings and the curses; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, and may love the Lord your God, obey His voice, and cling to Him. For He is your life and the length of your days."

Many people miss part of that passage. Choose life, that you may live, yes, but also that you may love the Lord your God. Earlier, Moses says, in Deuteronomy. Chapter 30, "Love the Lord with all your mind, and all your heart, and with all your being." He says, "The Lord will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants" so that we love the Lord.

Choose life, for God is Life. "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life," Jesus says. Choose Love, for God is love, 1 John 4 says. Jesus said that the first, or the foremost, commandment was to love the Lord. In Matthew Chapter 22, a man asks, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment." It's what Moses said, isn't it? Jesus goes on: "And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." All other commandments are based on these two, He says. He also says, in John 15, "This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you."

We are familiar with these passages, no doubt. And I've given you a lot of them, but all for one point. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves, for if we do this, we are loving as Jesus loved. If we love Him, He says, we will obey His commandment to love others as ourselves. As ourselves.

There's a popular saying these days: What would Jesus do? Because it's been popularized, we may find it a little tiring. But this whole week, that question has been on my mind. What would Jesus do if He were standing in front of Terry Schiavo? There is no doubt. He would heal her. He wouldn't get into any debate about whether her life was worth continuing in its present state. He would heal her.

In the Bible, there are many instances of people coming to Jesus because they'd heard of His healing power. Those who could not hear were brought by others who could. Those who could not talk had others ask for healing in their behalf. Those who could not come to Jesus were brought by others. To others, He came. Others, He healed from a distance, upon request by those who loved them.

Love your neighbors as yourselves. As yourselves. Identify with them. Put yourself where they are. Imagine you are them. And you

will feel compassion for them. God's love flows through compassion. Not through fancy words, but through compassion. You don't even have to know what to say. Just love them.

Matthew 14:14: "When He went ashore and saw a great throng of people, He had compassion for them and cured their sick." Mark 6:34: "As Jesus landed, He saw a great crowd waiting, and He was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and He began to teach them many things." Luke 7:13: "And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, Do not weep. And He went forward and touched the funeral bier, and the pallbearers stood still. And He said, Young man, I say to you, arise from death!"

Choose life that you might live and love the Lord. Listen to the Lord; you know what to do; He has circumcised your hearts that you may love Him, and that you may love your neighbor as yourselves.

Lord, we bring to you all those whose voices cannot be heard, who cannot come to you by themselves. We lift them up and become their voice. We cry out for them. We love them, and we move with Your compassion. We tell them, we tell Terry, and all those like her, "Arise." And we tell those who love the voiceless, "Do not weep."



11-1-03

Call Me Crazy: Jesus Still Heals

It's time I told my story, or at least part of it, and why I'm part of Desert Ministries.

I look pretty healthy, right? Well, it wasn't that long ago that I was bed-ridden, completely unable to function. I was unable to eat and I had constant pain and spasms, and no one expected me to get better. I had an "incurable" disease, along with numerous other problems that couldn't be cured. Well, here I am, standing before you, because I believed. I was healed, not in some auditorium, but on my kitchen floor, because I believed.

It's a long story, how I came to believe, and I'll probably go into it at some point, but for now, let me say that I never wanted another person to feel isolated or alone like I did, not if I could help it.

A couple days ago, I met with woman for business and I ended up praying for her healing; then she told me that the Holy Spirit told her the day before that I was coming and that I was a healer.

Radical, I know, because the church doesn't always teach this; it teaches that miracles ended with Jesus and the disciples. Does that also mean we're not to bring salvation to people? That Jesus' power to save ended with the disciples? That His commandment to take the gospel to the whole world no longer applies? For He told us to cleanse the lepers, cure the sick, cast out demons, and take the gospel to the whole world. Are we just being selective as to which we're supposed to do? Do we think Jesus has changed? Jesus is the same now and forever. Ah, people say, of course Jesus healed. He was God. Well, His disciples healed. Were they God? And when Jesus came to this earth, He made Himself of no account. He shed his power, and He called upon the power of the Holy Spirit. The disciples marveled at what He did – the fig tree, for example. But He told them they would do even greater things.

Last night, I got too cold, as I was taking my son Dain trick-or-treating. Later on in the night, my throat starting hurting, from sinus drainage. "Oh, you can't do a radio show, where you talk." Anytime I hear something like that, "you can't," I think, "I wonder what the Enemy is trying to keep me from." He means it as deterrence, but I take it as an indication to be even bolder. His words backfire on him, and I make sure of that! Whatever it was that I was going to do, I make sure I ramp it up even more! And be bolder! That's why I'm not hesitant to sound radical today.

Last week, I spoke about Terry Schiavo . . . I spoke about what Jesus would do. He wouldn't engage in some philosophical debate. He'd heal her. But people say, "Jesus isn't here. He isn't standing in front of her." Well, if He is, if you are, if you're a believer. "Don't you know that Jesus is within you?" John asks.

My son Dain stayed with his father on Thursday night. He got sick, was feverish, etc. I went to get him early yesterday morning, and we prayed on the way home. By the time we got home, he was fine, feeling perky and happy and energetic. He was fine all day. Then this morning, at about 4 a.m., he got sick again. He was burning up. I put my hand on his forehead and thought of the story where Jesus rebuked a fever that had taken Peter's mother-in-law. I looked at my little boy whom I love so much, and thought about how much God loves us. How He never wants us sick. I thought of that fever as the enemy. I would not allow it to hurt my child. I started talking to the fever. "Fever, I rebuke you in the name of Jesus. You come out of him right now!" I felt his forehead get cool immediately, and I started thanking God. I asked Dain how he felt, and he said he felt good. I asked, "Do you know why?" He said, "Because Jesus healed me." When I asked him about it this morning, I asked when he started feeling better. "While your hand was on my forehead."

I don't have any special anointing to heal. I simply know what Jesus has done. It took a lot of study to get to that point, but I know it. And I'm not afraid to talk about it, or pray for anyone. Many people would like to bring healing to people, but they're afraid they'll disappoint the sick person. They're not sure that God will heal them. Let me tell you, God hasn't changed. He wants to heal just as much now as He ever did. And He doesn't heal some and leave others unhealed. He is no respecter of persons. (Acts 10:34) He's not trying to teach you something by leaving you sick. He does not inflict pain. Besides, pain is a horrible teacher. God sent the Holy Spirit to teach us. And how does He do that? By talking to us. God didn't use His hands to create the world. He used His words.

Not everyone is healed because not everyone believes. Not everyone is saved, because not everyone believes. Yet God doesn't want one single person to perish. And we are not to fear disappointing people, because we don't know what God will do. We know what God will do, because He's already done it. He sent His Son to die for us so that we might have life, and have it more abundantly. Here and now. We know what God did. We just don't know what people will do. People are the ones who might disappoint you, not God.

Yesterday, I found out something about a couple of my family members that really disappointed me. I was very sad about it. Then my friend reminded me that it wasn't God putting that sadness on me, so I had a choice whether to accept it. I remembered the book of Isaiah, which says that He bore our griefs and our sorrows. We are to cast our cares on Him, because He will bear them away.

I quoted Isaiah to myself over and over again this morning, as I was fighting whatever it was that my head was doing – a virus, or whatever. "He bore our sicknesses and our diseases. By His stripes, we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5) Well, maybe it's not really true, people say. Maybe Isaiah was wrong. Well, Peter makes reference to that same quote. "By His stripes, we were healed." (1 Peter 2:24) And Jesus Himself quotes Isaiah when He said He came to give sight to the blind and set the captives free. (Luke 4:10) He said the prophecy was fulfilled in the listeners' hearing.

Who are captives? Anyone who's not living as God intended. It's said that Adam lived more than 900 years. Why? Perhaps because he didn't know how to die. He'd never seen anyone die, of "old age." He didn't know he was supposed to die. Or perhaps corruption and its effects have increased through the centuries.

As we enter the autumn or the winter of our lives, do we accept what the world tells us – that we are naturally going to get sick; that afflictions are natural; that getting sick is part of aging; that depression is common among the elderly? So we do nothing? There's a song I've been listening to lately. It goes, "I have not been called to the wisdom of the world, but to a God who's calling out to me. Even though the world may think I'm losing touch with reality, it would be crazy to choose this world over eternity." ("Crazy," by Mercy Me)

So, call me crazy. I don't mind. I wouldn't be standing here if I weren't.



Choose Love

Last week, I went into a little detail about my story. This week, I want to begin telling other people's stories, for every life has a story.

A few months ago, after the Radio Hour, a woman stopped me and told me she had something to tell me. I thought she might want to tell me something about the program, or something that had happened recently. As she started, I realized that she was going back into her memory, into her past. Those memories seemed to be more vivid, and maybe more important, to her than what had happened the week before.

"I have to tell you something," she began. She started relating how, years ago, when she was living in a house by herself, her yard had been vandalized, and certain items that had sentimental value had been destroyed. She was crushed. As she told me this, I took her hand. I believed she only wanted someone to understand what she had lost, how it still haunted her. I told her that I was sorry about what had happened. She pressed on. She still had something to tell me.

Somehow, she had learned who might have been responsible for causing the damage. It was a group of young boys from her own neighborhood. She approached the father of one of the boys, who told her that his son would never have been involved in mischief like that. He sent his son over to her house to apologize, repair the damage he could. The boy showed up at her door, sheepishly.

When she saw his face, she was angry. She was hurt. She thought about "chewing him out." But she knew she had a choice. She asked the boy if he would mow her lawn, and do some work on a regular basis, and she would pay him. Pay the person who had destroyed so much of what she had cherished.

"How many times must we forgive our brother?" the disciples asked Jesus. "Seven times?" "Seven times seventy," Jesus answered. (Matt. 18:22) Perhaps He was not just talking about how many times, but how much. Forgive him more than your heart can bear, seven times seventy.

The boy agreed, and began to show up on regularly, consistently. Soon, he was bringing his friends over, to sit with the woman, to talk with her, to hang out with his friends and ask her advice. She was candid with them about what she believed and what she valued, and what she believed they should value. "I was a Sunday School teacher for 25 years," she told me. That was important to her. What she told them was important to her.

She helped them make choices. They listened to her and respected her. And they had fun with her. As they would work or play in the back yard, she would sit outside and watch them, just enjoying them. And they enjoyed her.

Years later, the woman was alone at home, when she began to feel ill. She called her friend. He showed up immediately, and got her to the hospital. He made sure it was the one she had insisted upon, despite what others might tell her.

"He saved my life," she told me. "This boy who had vandalized my yard saved my life."

And all because of a choice. She looked at his face, and thought about her yard, and she chose between them. She chose to bless him rather than curse him. Once again, I am reminded of Deuteronomy. "Today, I have set before you life and death, the blessings and the curses; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live." She chose life. In choosing love, she saved two lives that day.



Christmas Wish: To Be an Offering

I talked with my mother a couple days ago. She was going to start shopping for my youngest son Dain. He had gone through a catalog and marked the things he “really, really wanted.”

When we finished discussing Dain’s Christmas list, she asked me what I wanted. “I don’t know,” I told her. “I haven’t given it a moment’s thought.” I hadn’t, and I wasn’t sure I wanted to, either. Thinking about what I wanted stirred up feelings I didn’t like – past hurts and disappointments.

When I was married, I usually just bought something for myself and wrapped it. I took joy in getting things I knew the kids would like. Christmas wasn’t about getting presents, I told myself. Material things were not going to bring meaning into my life. Hoping for something to come to you through other people brought only disappointment.

Sometimes I wished the tradition of giving presents had never begun. “Let’s put the emphasis somewhere else,” I thought. But I also really enjoyed giving gifts. It truly is better to give than to receive. But then it occurred to me. To give, that means there’s someone on the receiving end. If they didn’t receive, we couldn’t give. To allow others to find joy in giving, we must also be receivers.

My son Dain is a great example to me. He made a list of things he’d have fun with, but he also has been making presents for the people he loves. Every day, he makes something else and wraps it. I have a feeling that many of those gifts are things like old Christmas cards he’s cut out as “ornaments.” Or they might even be rocks. He’s fond of wrapping up rocks, just so he has something to give someone. It does his heart good to give. Because he’s wrapping up a little piece of himself in those gifts. He’s giving little pieces of his heart away. He’s saying, “I love you,” with those gifts.

Don’t those make the best gifts? The ones where our love comes through?

We cannot rely on “things” to comfort us. We cannot count on anything outside God to give us peace. We can only find comfort in love. In God, who is Love. And God’s love flows through us, fallible human beings we are. We can bring God to other people, and give them something they might never even have guessed that they needed, or wanted.

The other day, I went shopping for some boots to replace the ones I’d ripped out. Through a series of circumstances, the cashier had to close his register while a clerk searched the back room. I knew we’d there for a while, so I asked the clerk, “So, how are you?” He chuckled. We began to talk, and I learned that he had moved from Africa to study at a Bible college in the U.S. At one point, he asked if I had faith. I love questions like that! Where once I might have hesitated, I instead answered, “Yes. And I was healed through faith in Christ. I’m standing here, as a living testimony of the healing power of God.” We talked some more. Then, before I left, I reached out my hand and said, “The Holy Spirit be with you.”

As I took his hand, I felt something pass from me to him. It wasn’t a tangible substance, but it could be felt. It was love, God’s love, and we both knew it. It was joy. As I walked out of there, I had the biggest smile on my face. We’d both touched the Spirit, and in the oddest of places, in a checkout lane.

These kinds of encounters can happen anywhere. This is the real gift we need to be giving to people. This is the real gift we should be seeking – because it is the only one that satisfies. It can make a difference in someone’s life, and it will definitely make a difference in yours. It is the gift you give away but end up keeping yourself. Doubling, tripling, as it comes back to you. Give this kind of gift this season. Give the gift of love. It costs nothing, and it will never, ever disappoint you. “Such hope never disappoints or deludes or shames us, for God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us.”

(Romans 5:5)

What did I want for Christmas? What I wanted couldn't be wrapped up. What I wanted was an opportunity to give away what I'd been given. It sounds like an answer to a Miss America pageant. "I want world peace." But truly, what I want, because it is the only way to peace, is similar to the lyrics of a popular Christian song. "I want to leave a legacy, how will they remember me? Did I choose to love? Did I point to you enough?" ("Legacy," by Nichole Nordeman)

What I want is this: when people look at me, I want them to see God inside me, to feel God's love. I want to be a vessel, a channel. A gift. "I want to leave an offering," the song goes. "A child of mercy and grace who blessed Your name unapologetically."

If you can share God's love in a gift, by all means, do it. But put on the top of your Christmas wish list: "Let my light shine that others might see the love of God." I promise you, it's the best gift you can give yourself, too.



12-13-03

Give the Unexpected

I tossed and turned in my bed all last night. I'm not sure exactly why. I was tired enough to sleep well. Was there something that my unconscious mind was trying to resolve that my conscious mind hadn't or couldn't?

My dreams lately have been full of conflict, and struggle. Again, I'm not sure why. But I have realized that in those dreams, I've been using human means – my own strength or skills of argumentation – to overcome whatever or whoever is threatening me. It doesn't work. No one is convinced.

It's the Christmas season, as we know. I think we try to keep the focus where it should be, but I also think that we have such a tentative grasp of it that it slips away from us very easily. Just in the last couple days, I've encountered people who seem to be overwhelmed on all sides. Everyone has something in particular that they're worried about – big and small things. Things they're struggling with, and trying to resolve with human means. Things that stir all kinds of emotions within them.

As I was waiting for Dain to emerge from his Christmas program practice the other night, I visited with an acquaintance. "Weren't you just at Walmart?" I asked her. "Yes," she said. "I probably looked mad." She'd found the perfect gifts for her children a couple weeks before, and now they were gone. She was kicking herself for not getting them when she first saw them. Anger. Guilt.

While we were talking, a couple of her friends happened by. One said, "I am not in the mood this year to buy presents. I'm just going to put candy in their stockings and tell them that's good enough." Anger. Resentment.

Another woman said she'd only gotten three Christmas cards out, because she and her daughter were hand-stamping them, and it was painfully slow. Frustration. One was worried that she wouldn't have enough time or money or get her shopping done. Or that she wouldn't have the means to get something appropriate for her son to wear for the program. She didn't say it, but she felt it. Sadness. Fear of letting someone down. This one was me.

It's gradually been dawning on me that so much of what we feel comes from our expectations. Expectations that we put on ourselves or that we've ascribed to. Sure, I could forget about getting presents for my children and say that Christmas isn't about "things," but do you think my sons would understand that I was bucking the trend? Or would they be hurt that I didn't care?

So much of what we expect, and therefore feel, comes from our perspective. A child who never gets anything for Christmas is going to be thrilled to get even one gift. A child who doesn't have much to eat will be thrilled with a good Christmas dinner – even if it's only once a year. A sick person would be thrilled to feel well enough to eat a Christmas dinner. Someone who never gets visitors —

would be thrilled to see someone walk in, just to see her.

Jesus Himself was not what people expected. 4,000 years of waiting, and when He arrived, they did not recognize Him. “Isn’t this man from Galilee?” The Messiah was to be from the city of David. They didn’t realize He’d been born in Bethlehem, a city of David.

“The spirit of the Lord is upon Me,” Jesus read, from Isaiah. “He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor, to set at liberty the captives, to give sight to the blind, and to announce the acceptable year of the Lord. Today, the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:18-19) What was their emotional reaction, based on their expectations? Anger. They drove Him from the synagogue and the town, and meant to throw Him over the cliff to His death. He walked right through their midst.

We humans get so confused. We so easily get caught up in, well, everything around us. What everyone else is doing, what everyone else believes, what everyone else expects. It’s hard not to. Even knowing the reason I have joy, I can forget how to live at peace. “You’re not doing enough. You’re not doing the right thing.”

I think of a woman, alone, who expects nothing for Christmas because she never gets anything. No one visits her, and she expects that to continue. She only has memories of the days when she, too, scurried about, trying to get everything done. Now she can only sit and remember. She would do anything to be able to get out of her bed so she can scurry about, and be worried about little things. It would be a privilege to be busy, to be stressed, to be able to toss and turn in bed.

I thought of my own situation, and I remembered my parents’ recent gift to me, some money so I could buy my children some gifts without worry. It blessed them, as it blessed me. They gave me the ability to give, as I wanted.

The woman on my mind, this woman alone, has lost a lot. But perhaps her biggest loss is her ability to give. She cannot go out and bless anyone. She has no one to buy for, and no means to buy anything. She isn’t looking for gifts. She is looking for someone to give to. God isn’t looking for anything from you. He’s looking for people to give to. He has already given the gift, in His son. What He “needs” for Christmas are recipients.

God has given you the means to give as He wants. He has given you the strength. He has given you the resources. This is one area where your human means can be used, but through Him. Be His arms. Be His body. Be His heart. Walk into that room, and give someone the chance to give to you. It’s not about what you can give to them. It’s about allowing them to give to you.



1-31-04

The Reality of Truth

Whenever I start thinking about what to write for this program, my life literally flashes before my eyes. Now, it’s not that I panic; I just start reviewing my week to see what I’ve learned or experienced that might be helpful to someone else. I mention my life because I want people to know that I’ve “been there” – or at least in the vicinity! “There is no temptation that is not common to man.” (1 Corin. 10:17) That is, someone has experienced what you have. But I’m careful not to define truth by my experience. Quite the contrary. Truth defines my experience. The Word actually shapes it. “My word will not return to Me void.” (Isaiah 55:11)

This week, I’ve been thinking about Jesus’ temptation in the desert. Talk about someone having “been there.” Jesus was alone in the wilderness, he was tired, and he was hungry. His body was likely rebelling against Him. We tend to think Jesus had great advantages we don’t have. He was, after all, the Son of God. But He was tempted as a man. He laid aside His power as God, and looked to His Father as we would. I believe that Satan was tempting Him to act like God, to show Himself as God, and to forget about being a man. If He did that, how could He, as the perfect Son of Man, redeem mankind from its fatal choice as the world began?

He came to earth to be a man, to be our man, to be our substitute, to replace Adam and give us another choice, that of choosing——

Him and becoming His righteousness. Everything He did, He did as a man. That's a pretty radical statement, isn't it? Jesus Himself said it. "I do nothing on my own, but the Father in Me does the works." (John 14:10) He came to show us what we could do as men — mere men, merely believing.

When Satan tempted Jesus, I wonder if he stood physically in front of Him. Could Jesus see him, or just hear him? Did he whisper in His ear, as He does to us, so that we don't know if these thoughts are ours or his? Well, we can know assuredly that all lies come from Satan, no matter where we hear them, or from whom. He is, as Jesus said, the father of all lies. One thing I've discovered recently is that when I get a thought that makes me scared or sad or lonely or discouraged or beaten up or guilty — I can know for certain that it's a lie, for God does not work by fear. He works by love. When I hear a discouraging word, I know it's not the Word, and I immediately start saying the opposite thing, for the opposite of a lie is the truth! It's one way that Satan's stupidity backfires on him! He actually alerts me to the truth!

Satan even tried to twist the Word on the one who is the Word. I believe Satan was trying to get Jesus, somehow, to fear, for that is his chief weapon. Without it, he cannot operate. Just as God needs your faith to come into your life, Satan needs your fear to take your life from you. Faith and fear work similarly, to completely different ends. God's grace works by faith. Satan's destruction works by fear. Think of it as an epoxy solution; you need both parts for anything to stick! And you know how stuff "sticks" to you? How you cooperate, with either faith or fear? By agreeing with what you hear. By speaking. We are not asked to "call it like it is," but to "call those things that are not as though they were." (Romans 4:17) Satan wants us to agree with him. I'd rather agree with God, thank you very much!

A couple months ago, after having several job interviews go absolutely nowhere, I drove up to yet another, and I said, out loud, "Thank You, Lord, for letting me work in such a beautiful place! And so close to home!" Keep in mind that this was before the interview. I had no special word of knowledge. When I got home, I told the job it was mine, in the name of Jesus. I got the job.

A friend recently asked me if I ever wondered how much faith I have. Frankly, I've felt completely faithless. But, you know, it doesn't matter how you feel about the truth; it's still the truth. We can know, because God has told us, that we all have the measure of faith. The measure of faith. (Romans 12:3) If it's enough to lead us to salvation, it's enough for every other thing! And, if we have Jesus dwelling inside us, we have His faith. Surely that's enough for us!

What we often have trouble with is fear. It pulls in the opposite direction as faith. "Fear not. Believe only," Jesus said. One would nullify the other! Fear comes in many forms, many of them subtle and disguised. Jesus heard, "You're hungry. Your Father's not going to take care of you. Do it yourself, and turn this stone into bread." "You're powerless. You're nothing in this world. I can help you become something." "Your Father will not protect You. Throw Yourself off this cliff and prove me wrong, if you can. Don't you want to know the truth?"

What do we hear? That God the Father won't really help us, that we're on our own? These are the "vain imaginations that exalt themselves against the Word of God." (2 Corin. 10:5) We are to take these thoughts captive to Christ, say to them what Jesus would say to them. Jesus would say, "Move, mountain." Or, "Get behind me, Satan." And they'd move. It's what He tells us to do. Would He tell us this if we could not do it, if we had to be God to do these things? Jesus said, "He that believeth on me . . . greater works than these shall he do." (John 14:12)

Much of the temptation we face comes in the form of denying the Truth. We don't do it intentionally. We say we are denying reality when we say we are well when we feel sick, when we say the Lord provides for all our needs when our bank account is empty. I know it's hard to believe you're protected, when you're feeling vulnerable. I know it's hard to believe you're loved, when you're alone. But there is a promise of love to combat every fear. Perfect love casts out fear. (1 John 4:18) And God is love. I find myself making a choice between two "realities" — the one that says, "I am weak," and the one that affects reality by asserting, "Let the weak say, I am strong." (Joel 3:10)



Do You Believe Me?

My son Dain gives me such examples of how God loves us. I find myself thinking, “This must be how He looks at us, like, “Oh, Sweetie, don’t you understand? I love you.””

The other day, I brought a valentine into my son Erik’s room and handed it to him. My mother had sent it over for him. Dain saw me, with the valentine, a big, chocolate heart in a box. He came up behind me. “Mommy . . . I had one like that.”

“Honey, Grandma gave this one to Erik. It has his name on it.”

“She gave me one exactly like it.”

I know what he meant. He thought I was giving his valentine to Erik. He tried to be brave, but it only lasted a moment. His face went soft, fell, and tears started streaming down his cheeks. “That means that Grandma . . .” He could barely get the words out. “. . . didn’t give me one . . .”

“Honey . . . no, no . . . I’m sure Grandma has one for you. She wouldn’t forget you. This is Grandma we’re talking about.”

“But I put it on my little table, and I looked in the exact spot earlier, and I didn’t see it.”

“Dain, you mean she gave it to you already?”

“Yes. I put it on my little table, and I looked in that exact spot.”

“Dain, a lot of things get put on your table. It might have gotten covered by something. Now, we know that it didn’t move by itself, and I didn’t move it or do anything with it, and you didn’t move it. It’s still there. It has to be. Do you believe me?”

Do you believe me? This is the point I suddenly felt as if Jesus were talking to me. “Do you believe Me? I’ve told you what I would do for you. I’ve told you what I have done for you. Do you believe Me?”

But like us, who so often have to be shown to believe, Dain needed to see for himself, I knew. “Go down and look on your table, Dain.”

When he came back up, his face was lighter, relieved. The valentine was, of course, still there. I hugged him and kissed the top of his head. Precious boy. So loved. Who would ever take something from him? Yet, for a brief, fearful time, that’s what he’d thought, for he couldn’t make any other sense of it. His valentine seemed to have disappeared, at the precise time his brother’s had appeared.

“Oh, Honey, no one who loves you is going to take something from you that was meant for you. Grandma would never, ever do that. She loves you.”

Oh, that’s how the Lord looks at us. Don’t we know He doesn’t keep from us the things that were meant for us? That once He’s given them, He doesn’t take them back? What kind of loving Father would do that? Sometimes I think we are New Covenant people acting as if we still lived under the Old Covenant. David worried that the Holy Spirit would be taken from him. We even sing this song in church! “Take not Your Holy Spirit from me.” David had just sinned with Bathsheba. He was conscious of his sin. Our sins

have been forgiven, through Christ, through the New Covenant. New. Better. “A better promise,” the Bible says. (Heb. 8:6) “The old has passed away. Behold, all things are made new.” (1 Corin. 5:17)

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to die for us. Gave Him to us, and for us. He was meant for us. He is here today, for us, as is the Holy Spirit. There is no time where we don't have access to Him, where He is not ours, where His gifts are withdrawn.

There are some who say miracles passed away with the disciples, that God no longer works as He did then. When, I want to know, did that happen? When did the Lord stop loving us? When did Jesus change, Who is the same “yesterday, today and forever”? (Heb. 13:8) When did the Lord take away the Holy Spirit, the one He promised us would be given and would never leave? “I will ask the Father to send Another Comforter, that He remain with you forever. [The Comforter, the Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengthener, and Standby] . . . the Spirit of Truth, Whom the world cannot receive because it does not see Him or know and recognize Him. But you know and recognize Him, for He lives with you and will be in you.” (John 14:16-17)

“I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.” He said, “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” (John 14:23)

Does that sound like He's leaving? He's moving in! “I will not leave you as orphans (comfortless, desolate, bereaved, forlorn, helpless): I will come back to you. Just a little while now, and the world will not see Me any more, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. At that time, you will know (for yourselves) that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you.” (John 14:18)

He asks, as I asked my son, “Sweetheart, do you believe Me?”



2-21-04

“I Lay Down My Own Life”

I'm sure most of you have heard about the controversy surrounding a certain film coming out shortly. It is of course, Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. The movie isn't even out yet, and it's getting enormous attention. But is it the right kind? The world would have us take our eyes off Jesus and concentrate on something else — a different message, a different Jesus.

While I'm not one to get into the fray just because everyone else is, I feel like I need to say something that I haven't heard anyone else saying. I say this because I'm hoping that we can first dispel the notion that Christians blame anyone for Christ's death, and that we can second stay focused on Jesus Himself, for that is how we achieve any kind of victory.

Diane Sawyer reported that 82 percent of the American population consider themselves Christians. One percent of the population is Jewish. Considering the history of persecution of this minority, we can all understand their fear that this movie might stir up anger. Our Lord was brutally mistreated. “Watching” Him, as represented by an actor, being horribly beaten may overwhelm our emotions. It's one reason I may not see the movie at all.

Mel was asked who was to blame for Jesus' death. He said, “Everyone.” He includes himself in that group. In the film, it is his hand that holds the nails driven through Christ's hands and feet. That seems like a sound answer, but, as in all things, we must keep our eyes on Jesus in this matter. Has anyone asked what Jesus might say about who was to “blame” for His death? He actually did say something about it, in John 10:17 and 18: “For this reason, the Father loves Me, because I lay down My own life — to take it back again. No one takes it away from Me. On the contrary, I lay it down voluntarily. I am authorized and have power to lay it down and I am authorized and have power to take it back again. These are the instructions which I have received from My Father.”

In one sense, we are all to “blame” for Jesus' death, and not just representationally or figuratively. It was the sin of the world that

brought Jesus here in the first place, in order to redeem us. Every single one of us needs salvation, so in that sense, we are all responsible for His death.

Yet, still, why do we fixate on blaming anyone for Jesus' death? Would we have prevented it if we could? When Peter suggested that Jesus might not have to die, Jesus told him, "Get behind me, Satan." Would we have preferred that Jesus did not die? Where would we be then? Unforgiven and unredeemed. Of course, we hate the way He was mistreated and misunderstood; surely we would have spared Him that, if we could. Or would we? Didn't Isaiah say, "He was bruised for our transgressions . . . by His stripes we were healed"? (Isaiah 53:5)

Oh, we wish that there could have been another way for Jesus to fulfill His mission, to complete the Father's will that not one of these should perish. Jesus asked if there was another way. There was not. The only way to our redemption was His suffering, and His death. He took it upon Himself, willingly. He willed it, by yielding to the Father's will. And in that act, that perfect, selfless act, He proved Himself the one sinless man capable of bearing our sins, our diseases, our wounds, our suffering, away with Him on the cross.

This was an act of free will, not something forced upon Him. God works no other way. He does not force His will on anyone, not even His own Son. The world did not force its will on Him, either. He could have escaped if He'd chosen to. Think of the times Jesus walked through the midst of the crowd, unharmed. After preaching in His hometown, they meant to throw Him off a cliff. He passed right through the crowd. Then, when He was about to be arrested, He stopped His followers from defending Him: "Do you suppose that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will immediately provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must come about this way?" (Matt. 26:52-54)

Jesus chose this. And why? His Father sent Him to this world, the whole world, out of love. "For God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten son to die for us." (John 3:16) Jesus consented to die, out of that same love. Listen to John again, who is aptly considered the "love apostle": Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd risks and lays down His own life for the sheep . . . Even as the Father knows Me and I also know the Father — and I am giving My life and laying it down on behalf of the sheep." (See John 10)

He gave His life in protection of His sheep. What does He tell Peter three times before His death? "Feed My sheep." He asks Peter every time, "Do you love Me?" Peter answers, "You know I love You." Three times Jesus asks, and three times He tells Peter to feed His sheep. (John 21:15-18) If we love Him, we will feed His sheep. How does He ask to be loved? By our loving His sheep. We can love *Him* by loving others. Isn't that amazing?

"And I have other sheep [beside these] that are not of this fold. I must bring and impel those also; and they will listen to My voice and heed My call, and so there will be [they will become] one flock." (John 10:16) So that we become one flock. Does this sound like a Jesus who wants to hold the world accountable for His death? Does He not ask the Father to forgive them, for they know not what they do? His last act was one of love and forgiveness! The very act of dying was an act of love and forgiveness.

This is why I say we can't lose sight of Jesus. If we are like Peter, who starts out great, walking on the water, but sinks when he starts looking at the boisterous waves around him, we'll lose sight of what Jesus did, and what it means to us. Keep looking to Him, and looking to His word, for the answers are there. Don't fixate on the boisterous waves around you. Stay on top of the water. Look at Jesus Himself. What you'll find is love and forgiveness. A total selflessness, a complete sacrifice, on our behalf. On everyone's behalf.



2-28-04

No Expiration Date

Last night, I heard something advertised as good "for a limited time only." It reminded me of what I'd spoken about for the program two weeks ago: how God doesn't give or promise something, then take it back. My youngest son, Dain, had believed for

a few panicked minutes that his valentine had been given to his brother – that it was no longer his. I spoke that week about Jesus promising that the Holy Spirit – the Comforter – would be given and would always remain. It was not a “limited-time-only” offer. So many people seem to think God doesn’t work the way He did 2,000 years ago. The Bible declares, “Jesus the same yesterday, today and forever.” (Heb. 13:8) He’s still the Healer, the Deliverer, the Restorer, that He has always been. Dain asked my mom this week, “What do you suppose He’s been doing up there in heaven for 2,000 years?”

Sitting at the right hand of the Father, that’s for sure. But have you ever thought about that? Is He “just” sitting there? And why is He at the right hand? It is said that the arm of God is His power. When we speak of His arm, we speak of His power. And 1 Corinthians tells us, “Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corin. 1:24) And right may symbolize righteousness. Could it be that He’s at the right hand because this puts Him right there, ready to do with power and righteousness as the Father instructs, as He always has? “I have never spoken on My own authority or of My own accord or as self-appointed,” John 12:49 reads, “but the Father who sent Me has Himself given me orders concerning what to say and what to tell. And I know that His command means eternal life.” He does exactly as the Father instructs Him, He said. Since He hasn’t changed, He’s still doing that. All the Father has to do is raise His right hand, or perhaps touch Jesus, or perhaps point, with that right hand. Sitting at the right hand of the Father, Jesus is right there, ready to do immediately as the Father instructs.

“Good for a limited time only.” I laughed when I heard it, thinking how temporary and fast are our lives, that is, how fast we live them. I’d spent most of the previous month working on about 70 ads – coupons, really – for a client of mine. All with expiration dates. Some of them seemed fairly generous – good for at least three months. Some would expire almost as soon as the coupon magazine came out. I’d worked feverishly at the end, trying to get them all revised and finalized to meet my client’s print deadline. I told Paul that I’d been burning the candle at both ends, but I think I was melting at the middle, too!

So, here I was, working and hurrying to get something out there that would expire before I got the next issue done. These were some good offers; too bad they wouldn’t last. I was hoping that I would last, what with working another job and taking care of two kids, too. I bolstered myself by saying out loud, “Jesus is my Strength. Jesus is my creativity. Jesus is my Rest.” When I felt ill, I said, “No” to symptoms – chills and spasms – “Jesus is my Healer” – and they went away. People are surprised by that. I’m not, not anymore. I’ve seen God work. I’ve felt God work. Once you’ve felt that, you truly never doubt again. Once you know that He’s touched you, you don’t forget.

I heard a woman speak yesterday about the importance of touch. We all need to be touched. We, as children of God, with the Spirit of the Lord inside us, can touch people for God, with God. “Heal the sick,” He told us. Jesus touched people and they were healed, saved and delivered. We, as the body of Christ – as Christ’s body here on earth – bring God’s touch to them when we touch. “I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, he who receives and welcomes and takes into his heart any messenger of Mine receives Me in just the same way, and he who receives and welcomes and takes Me into his heart receives Him who sent Me.” (John 13:20) People who receive into their heart our loving touch receive God’s loving touch!

I think of all the caregivers who touch those they care for. They’re touching people for Jesus and with Jesus. How awesome, and how I thank you for what you do, every day you work with and love these people, responding in compassion. Jesus touched people out of compassion. It was out of compassion for the family of Lazarus that Jesus raised him from the dead. “I know that he will rise again in the Resurrection,” Mary said of her brother. Jesus said, “I am the Resurrection.” (John 11:25)

He also said He was the Light of the world. “I have come as a Light unto the world, so that whoever believes in Me may not continue to live in darkness.” (John 12:46) He tells us to partake of and participate in that light. “While you have the Light, believe in the Light, that you may become sons of the Light, and be filled with Light.” (John 12:36) He says that He’ll be there in our midst, with us and in us, that when we do as He did, we do these things to Him. “As you have done to the least of these, you have done to Me.” (Matt. 25:40)

So, He tells us to become children of the Light, to bring it to other people, and that He’ll be right there, coming right from the right

hand of the Father, to carry out the Father's command to bless and love, heal and restore, deliver and save – in an offer that is still good, 2,000 years later.



3-6-04

Your Sins are on the Ocean Floor

My oldest son, Ryan, called yesterday to see if he could stay at my house tonight. It was an answer to prayer. I'd been missing him terribly. But it was more than missing him. I missed what we had when he was young. He was my first child; we were inseparable. Where I went, he went. Now, he felt lost to me, and I blamed myself. The very sweetness of those memories made the loss even more bitter.

It was one of many memories that have resurfaced this week. People from my past cropped up everywhere. Dreams and thoughts came to me, recalling events that made me sad, or ashamed, or hurt, or embarrassed, or exposed, or sinful. I told the Lord I was casting the cares of those thoughts on Him. "It's no use," some little thought said. "It's too much. Your sins are too many, and too great. You're never going to feel forgiven." I refused that thought. Sometimes you have to let what you know override what you feel – until what you feel lines up with what you know! Concerning my pain, I spoke, "He bore my sorrows, Isaiah said." I have to allow Jesus to take them, so that they are in fact, in my heart, carried away. As for my particular sinfulness, I said, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23)

We have a common affliction, it seems: memory. How many of us can't seem to get out of our past, and just keep reliving our sin and shame and guilt, or pain and loss and regret? Sometimes, our memories of long-ago events are more clear than recent ones. A woman once told my friend Paul: "You'd better be making good memories." Sounds sweet, but she prefaced it this way: "You know what hell is? Memories." We want to shove those thoughts aside, don't we? We'll never be in that position, right? We've never done anything bad enough that our sins will follow us around, right? We've never experienced enough pain that we'll never forget it, right?

Right? Are you sure? By all appearances, I seem to be doing okay. I have a close relationship with the Lord, closer than I've ever had. His Word lives in my heart and pops out of my mouth. I'm a happy person. The joy of the Spirit fills me. I have wonderful people in my life, great work to do. God provides for all my needs. I am blessed, blessed, blessed.

But still, memories haunt me, and I don't think that's a casual expression. I believe there's a spirit of oppression that comes with painful memories. It comes to remind us that we're really not worthy of forgiveness. But that's absurd! Who is worthy of forgiveness? I mean, who needs forgiveness but sinners? Who needs healing but the sick? "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick . . . I did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." (Mark 2:17) We think we have to get holy before we can receive from God. We don't make ourselves worthy of forgiveness before we can get it. We don't make ourselves acceptable before the Lord. It is Christ. He puts us in good standing with the Father. He is our righteousness. We can't be holy, apart from Him. It's a gift — of grace!

We say we believe in forgiveness, but do we let it penetrate us? Dr. Roger Sapp relates a story of a minister who had trouble receiving from God. He had to tell the man three times, "Pastor, forgiveness is real," before this man who'd preached forgiveness embraced it himself. "Oh," he said, "you mean for me." As soon as he took into his heart the truth he knew, he felt worthy to receive from God, and he was immediately healed.

It is not our sinfulness per se that keeps us from receiving from God. No, it our consciousness of our sin, that keeps us apart from God – even when we've been reunited with Him in fact, by the fact of Jesus' sacrifice for us. Even those who have changed their lives need to be set free from past mistakes. I think about two people as examples. First, the Apostle Paul, who persecuted our Lord and watched as a crowd stoned Stephen to death. How do you forget that? Paul's answer: "I do not say I have been made perfect . . . I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." (Phil. 3:12)

Second, a paralyzed man whose friends lowered him through the roof to be healed: What did Jesus say? “Son, your sins are forgiven you and put away [that is, the penalty is remitted, the sense of guilt removed, and you are made upright and in right standing with God].” (Mark 2:5) What did Jesus do to heal the man? He let him know that his sins were forgiven. Did He value forgiveness of sins above healing, or did He know that this man’s awareness of his sin made him feel unworthy to receive everything the Lord wanted to do for him?

Could it be that the memories that haunt you are the ones where there has been no forgiveness, or no understanding? Do you need to be forgiven, or do you need to forgive? Who really suffers when you don’t forgive? You do. As you forgive, it will be forgiven you. Mark, Chapter 11: “If you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.” And yes, forgiveness is real. John, Chapter 20: “If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of anyone, they are retained.”

I ask you to consider forgiveness as a step in healing emotional wounds, in casting the cares of your memories upon the Lord. You may even have to “forgive” God, if you feel He’s betrayed you. That’s a matter of more clearly understanding that God is never, ever, ever behind the pain you suffer. I “forgave” God for abandoning me to a horrible and long illness when I came to understand that I’d been wrong about His will for me — when I saw that His will for me had never been illness, but only, only, only healing. It was my understanding that needed adjusting. Once my head got readjusted, I began to trust God again. I had to ask forgiveness for abandoning Him. He never abandoned me. I just thought He had. “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge,” He said. (Hosea 4:6)

So, all this to say: we need to get our heads adjusted to get our hearts adjusted. “Know me,” I kept hearing from the Lord. To know Him is to trust Him. To know Him is to be healed. To know Him is to know that He remembers our sins no more. This is how a contemporary Christian song helps me remember that He doesn’t remember: “Your sins are forgotten/they’re on the bottom/of the ocean floor. Your sins are behind you/they’ll never find you/out on the ocean floor.” (“Ocean Floor,” by Audio Adrenaline)



4-3-04

Proclaim Liberty to the Captives

A couple nights ago, I had an anxious dream. I dreamed that it was about five minutes until airtime for this program, and I hadn’t written anything. “What am I going to say? What do I know well enough to speak about off the top of my head?”

It was a dream, but I do wonder sometimes what I’m going to say to a group of people who have lived twice as long as I have, and undoubtedly have twice as much wisdom. And who am I, walking around out here on my own, to be talking about a life of freedom in God, to people who may feel trapped by their bodies and their lives? What could I possibly offer in terms of encouragement? What do I say that wouldn’t sound hollow? “Be of good cheer?” How do I say that to people anywhere in any circumstances that are difficult? I remember well-intending people giving me the oddest of “encouraging words” when I was very ill. “At least it’s not cancer,” they said. I couldn’t eat without getting sick, and I was in constant pain, I’d been in bed for two years, but it was supposed to be comforting that at least I wasn’t going to die? Who wants to live a life like that?

Who wants to live a life like the one we are given here? Do you ever find yourself asking that? Then are you ashamed? Do you find to try something encouraging, but find it tiring trying to pump yourself up? What gives us hope? Is it waiting for the “other side”? What if you’re 43 and you have half your life to live before you reach the other side?

I have a friend who is in difficult and absurdly unfair circumstances. He’s in jail because he got ill and got behind in his child support payments. The judge sentenced him to six months to “consider his priorities.” The “other side” is six months from now; where is his comfort until then? His employer couldn’t hold his job for him, so when he does get out, he will have no job and no way to pay child

support then, either. This seems unjust, yes? But what of the others in there with him? If they “deserve” to be in jail, do we overlook them?

I’ve been thinking about them since I heard from my friend, who calls me collect about once a week. He tells me they listen to this program, and he’s passed around some of my writings to them. I’m moved and touched, and deeply grateful that the Lord has allowed me to encourage people in ways I never imagined. I tell you, this is literally what I live for, to touch those in any kind of desert, brought on by age or otherwise. Any kind of “otherwise.”

Last week, my fiancée, Mitch, and I were sitting in the Omaha airport, waiting for a flight to Chicago. I heard something behind me. I turned to see a man appearing to have a convulsion of some sort. I saw a wheelchair beside him, and concluded, “He must be handicapped. He must deal with this all the time.” I felt like crying, and I immediately began to pray. I didn’t know what was wrong with him, so I prayed, “Lord, touch him. Be with him. In Jesus’ name, I ask that the Holy Spirit break the bondage of his disease.” Then I went to find airport security. The rescue team was already on its way. They attended to him, but I kept feeling the urge to ask him if I could touch him and pray for him. What should I do? Would I embarrass him by approaching him?

It came time to board our flight. But before I left, I asked a police officer how the man was doing. “I don’t want to be nosey, but I’m concerned about him. I’ve been praying for him.” The officer looked at me kindly, and said, “He’s intoxicated. His friends dropped him off here, and we’re watching him until he sobers up.”

For a moment, I felt better. No disease. No life-threatening disease. He’d recover. And he’d done this to himself. I stopped myself. What difference did that make? Several things crossed my mind. First, it can be horribly frightening to be in such a state, where you don’t even know what your body’s doing, and alcohol can certainly kill and steal and destroy. Second, as I told Mitch, “He still needs to be set free.” And third, I asked, “How would Jesus have responded?”

That’s what’s been on my mind ever since. I kept praying for the man, and I started thinking about how Jesus treated people who’d caused their “own” trouble, who’d put themselves into a prison of some sort. It hit me that we are all in a prison of some kind or another, some worse than others, some of our own making, some created by the evil that seeks to harm us and enslave us. We are all in need of God’s mercy and forgiveness. We have all fallen short of the glory of God. Who are we to judge whether we are to have compassion on another based on circumstances?

Jesus dealt compassionately with everyone who came to Him humbly. To those who knew they needed forgiveness, he gave it. Those suffering from disease — self-inflicted or not, sin-produced or not — received healing. Those who already felt justified and who needed nothing from Him received nothing. They could not! They were not willing, even as Jesus was! They did not acknowledge that they needed Him! “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Luke 13:34)

Jesus rejoices over the humble and the willing — the lost who know they are lost — and mourns for those who are lost and do not realize it. Tomorrow, we celebrate Palm Sunday, the day the humble and the willing rejoiced over Jesus. He told the disapproving Pharisees, “I tell you that if these keep silent, the very stones will cry out.” (Luke 19:40) In the midst of the celebration, Jesus began to cry out and to cry. The King began to weep; our King began to weep for us. “And as He approached, He saw the city, and He wept over it, exclaiming, ‘Would that you had known personally, even at least in this your day, the things that make for peace (for freedom from all the distresses that are experienced as the result of sin and upon which your peace — your security, safety, prosperity, and happiness — depends)! But now they are hidden from your eyes.’” (Luke 19:42)

Their peace had been hidden from their eyes — they had been blinded. Jesus said this about those who believed they earned their own righteousness. “Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!” (Matt. 23:24) “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith.” (Matt. 23:23) He tells a parable in Luke 18 of two men, one who prayed before and with himself — not even to God

— proclaiming his goodness: “I fast twice a week, and I give tithes of all that I gain.” He said he was thankful he was not like “the rest of men — robbers, swindlers, adulterers — or even this tax collector here.”

“But the tax collector, standing at a distance, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but kept striking his breast, saying, ‘O God, be favorable (be gracious, be merciful) to me, the especially wicked sinner that I am!’ I tell you, this man went down to his home justified, rather than the other man; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:13-14)

Jesus did not come to judge the world. He came to save that which was lost. He came to “heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.” (Isaiah 61:1, Luke 4:18)

In this ministry, we often quote the passage where Jesus tells us to visit the sick. “As you have done to the least of these, you have done to Me.” Well, that passage (Matthew 25) also reveals Jesus’ attitude toward other populations: “Then the King will say to those at His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, I was a stranger and took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me, I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to see Me.’ ”

Whether you are in a prison of your own or someone or something else’s making — sickness, disease, affliction, circumstances — being touched by God can set you free, right where you are. And that is my prayer for you, just as it was my prayer for the man bound by alcohol. What it comes down to this: You don’t need the “right” words. You don’t need a “magic formula”; you don’t need a performance. You cannot justify yourself. Those who know they need the Lord and ask for His help are the ones who will receive it. I may not know your circumstances, I may not know your needs, but the Lord does. And I know this: “Ask and you shall receive.” (John 16:24)



4-10-04

Sunday’s Coming

It’s Saturday, the day before Easter Sunday. I wonder if much has been written or said about the Saturday in Holy Week. It has no “name,” like Maundy Thursday, or Good Friday, which we call good only in retrospect, because we can look back and see that what happened on Sunday — His resurrection — was only possible because of what happened on Friday — His death. But what about Saturday? What did the disciples do on Saturday, before they knew what would happen on Sunday? Did they hide, fearing the same fate might await them, grieving their loss, and forgetting or not understanding what Jesus had said about His death?

It’s Saturday now, literally. Is it also Saturday, figuratively? Do we hide, fearfully, wondering what will happen to us, and what has happened to our Lord? Where is He, and where are His promises? Doesn’t it look like God is not coming? We pray, we declare, and we don’t see what we expect, so we think our answer is not coming?

Did those disciples think all was lost? What kept them hanging on? What keeps us hanging on?

“You believe because you have seen,” Jesus told Thomas. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” (John 20:29)

I’ve reminded myself of this lately. “Keep believing until you see. You don’t know what’s around the corner. If you stop believing, what’s on its way will not reach you.” It’s like you ordered something through the mail. It was paid for, and shipped. But then you moved, and it couldn’t be delivered. You “moved.” God didn’t!

There’s a story about Daniel that I like. As he was praying, the angel Gabriel appeared to him, before he’d finished his prayer. Some time later, he prayed again, only this time, his answer did not come for three weeks. Daniel kept praying, and Gabriel did arrive. —

Daniel asked him why it took so long. Gabriel said, “Your prayer was answered as soon as you started praying, but the Prince of Persia detained me.” (Daniel 10:13) You don’t know what is keeping your answer in limbo. Perhaps it is opposition by Satan. Perhaps God has spoken to someone who can help you, but they aren’t hearing clearly, or are wrestling with what they heard, or are having trouble being obedient. The problem is not with God. “I will answer them before they call,” He says. (Isaiah 65:24) Before we even pray! And Paul tells us, “This is the confidence we have, that when we pray anything according to His will, we know He hears us. And if He hears us, He will answer us.” (1 John 5:14-15)

If He answers, through all our Saturdays of waiting and struggling, why does Sunday seem to tarry? If it is indeed “finished,” as Jesus declared on the cross, why do our answers elude us? My health has been giving me fits, even though I fully believe that the healing power of God is working in me. I asked God what was going on, why I was still getting sick. I heard this: “It doesn’t matter what it is or why; you know what to do about it.” I know what He meant. I didn’t have to figure out the mechanism by which the evil forces and intentions of Satan were working, or what to call them. I simply had to do what I knew to do. And that is look to Jesus. He is fully capable of taking care of what is coming against me, whatever it is, and why. My only job? Something He’d told me many times before. “Believe.” That’s all He asked me to do.

Believing until Sunday comes. That’s the trick, isn’t it? “I believe. Help my unbelief.” (Mark 9:24) I know that I cannot see all that God can, so I’m better off doing what He asks and letting Him work it all out. Let Him speak to those He needs, let Him call them. I think about my experience with cows, oddly enough. If you chase them, they end up scattered all over the countryside. You don’t drive cows; you have to lead them. Hold out a bucket of grain, and call, “Come, Boss,” then get out of the way before they run you over!

God does not chase or drive. He gently calls. “He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out,” He said. “The sheep follow him, for they know his voice.” (John 10:3-4) Sheep or cows, the principle’s probably the same! If you feel driven and scattered and lost, you can be certain it’s not God doing the chasing. While the world yells and chases us, can we hear the still, small voice calling us amid all that clamor? Do we remember what Jesus told us? That He will not leave us comfortless?

We know His voice. But the “trick” is in hearing it. And then in choosing it. It’s a foundational principle of our faith, this matter of choice. Yet we seem to forget this, when it comes to what we think are “unanswered” prayers. If your Sunday answer depends on the cooperation of other people, you have to remember that they have to hear and choose His will. They have to believe, they have to be obedient, and sometimes that’s just hard to do!

Sometimes, what we hear seems to make no sense. We can’t see what would come of our obedience. One fall day, one beautiful Saturday afternoon, I heard this: “Go to Murphy’s before the OBS All-Stars quit playing.” Huh? It made about as much sense to me then as it does to you now. But I just said, “Okay,” and I went. I watched as an organ player created amazing music. He told me later that he had seen me, standing in the very back of the place, because a “light was shining” on me. His name is Mitch, and we’re engaged to be married.

Now, I ask, did I see him coming? Did I know he was right around the corner? Did I know that my obedience to a voice I recognized but did not understand would lead to his prayers and mine being answered? Did I know that Sunday was coming?

So, I say to you, “Hang on! It is finished. Sunday’s coming. Sunday’s coming!”



5-1-03

Remembrance

“Can you read that to me again?” she asked. “I want to hear it again, so I remember it.”

Remembering. The young woman had been thinking all week about remembering. She'd started wondering how many people were still thinking about Jesus and the Resurrection, three weeks after Easter. She'd seen a bumper sticker proclaiming, "He Arose." It was almost startling; that was something we're accustomed to seeing only on Easter. But afterwards? What then? Do we forget until next Easter?

"Can you read it again?" the woman asked. "I want to remember."

"Sure," the young woman said. " 'Son, attend to my words, for they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh.' "

"Jesus is the Word," the older woman said.

"That's right."

"He sent the Word, and the Word healed them."

"Absolutely."

The woman put her frail hand to her heart, and then closed her eyes, which had felt strained of late. She kept them shut for a moment. When she opened them again, she looked at the young woman strangely. "Oh, hello. Who are you?"

"Grandma, it's me. Annie."

"I had a granddaughter named Annie. Such an angel."

"It's me, Grandma. Annie." She put her hand on top of her grandmother's hand, and closed her own eyes. "Lord, be with her. Fill her. Touch her. I know You love her, even more than I do."

Without opening her eyes, her grandmother spoke. "Do this in remembrance of Me."

"What, Grandma?"

"Jesus doesn't want us to forget Him. He said, 'Do this in remembrance of Me.'"

"We haven't forgotten Him, Grandma."

"Well, someone forgot to call Him, because He's not here."

Annie had tried to get used to seeing her grandmother this way. For years, at every party, she had been the one to remember and tell every joke she'd ever heard. At Bible studies, in the car, at the kitchen table, out to eat, wherever she was, she was the one who could recite verses from memory, just the right ones, at just the right times. Whenever she hosted a party or a study, she was the heart and the life of the gathering, and she made sure everyone felt welcome in her home, sparsely but carefully decorated. She never cared much about accumulating things. It was the people she loved who made her world. Before beginning any kind of celebration, Grandma would pray, out loud, thanking God for the friends who had blessed her life. Where was that woman now? Where were her things? Where were her friends?

"Please keep reading," Grandma suddenly said. "Only read something from the New Testament. I want to hear Jesus talking."

“Okay,” Annie said. She flipped to Luke. Where was that passage? She wished she could remember verses the way Grandma could. She stopped herself. The way Grandma once could remember. She found the passage she was looking for, and then stopped again. She looked up, and into Grandma’s now-open eyes, which were watching her intently. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind . . .”

Grandma was mouthing the words, not missing a single one. Then she said aloud, “. . . to set at liberty those who are oppressed; and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

Grandma didn’t stop looking at her. She held Annie’s gaze. “I remember.”

“Yes, Grandma.” She put her hand into her grandmother’s soft palm, and felt warm fingers tighten around hers.

Light shone from her face, her eyes gleamed. “Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. He still heals, delivers and saves. And He needs our help. Don’t ever forget that.”

“I won’t, Grandma.”

“I know you won’t, Annie. That’s why you’re here.”



6-5-04

Imitate the Word, Not the World

It’s funny how just one thing you hear can start a whole thought process.

I heard on the radio a couple days ago, “Be imitators of God.” I’d been struggling with illness – again. Frustration said, “Yeah, but God is a spirit. He doesn’t have to put up with a malfunctioning body!”

It seemed like advice from someone who didn’t know the “reality” of physical afflictions. It seems many good people are good at talking about salvation in the hereafter and even emotional healing through Christ. But how many will talk straight about the here-and-now of pain, sickness, disease, and suffering? Our social and even religious cultures have given us answers that sound like they came from the mouth of God. But many do not, and can give us the wrong idea about God’s character and what He’s willing to do for us.

Knowing this, I still thought, “But God is a spirit without a stupid body to deal with!” How could I imitate something I was not? That was the man’s point. “You will become more like what you imitate,” he said. I also heard, in my head, “You are a spirit,” and I remembered this: “We have a high priest who understands our suffering.” (Hebrews 4:15) Jesus, of course, had a body. He is the Word made flesh. God didn’t need to take on human flesh so He could understand our suffering, but so that we could know He understands.

As Our Father, He feels what His children feel. “When you do this to one of the least of these, you have done it to Me.” Even in human terms, that makes sense. When your children hurt, don’t you hurt? If someone wanted to hurt you, couldn’t they hurt your children? Don’t you suppose Satan is trying to do the same thing, hating God as he does?

God gently reminded me of His Word, which is the “real” authority in our lives – no matter what we experience or see. I’ve been holding fast to this concept lately, even that morning. As horrible as I felt, I declared, “The healing power of God is working mightily

in me. There is no greater power than God's." Didn't look like it, didn't feel like it, but I knew it.

People will tell you things like, "God never gives you more than you can handle." Where, is that in the Bible, and who said it? Some say, "It doesn't need to be in the Bible. We have other sources for information." Like what? Experience? Do you want to rely on your life's experiences to define God's intentions — or the other way around? If we went by our experiences, we'd believe that God means for us to suffer — for life is fraught with suffering, and with evil, for that matter. Does God intend evil to come upon you? Jesus said, "Your will be done on earth as it is heaven . . ." quickly followed by "lead us away from temptation." It's obvious that God's will is not for us to be tempted!

The world is often the source of what we think comes from God. But the Lord tells us not to be conformed to this world, but to renew our minds with His Word. (Romans 12:2) People say, "God never gives you more than you can handle," and we think that sounds good. But this is what the Word says, in 1 Corinthians: "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape." (1 Corin. 10:13) How is this different from what we usually hear? God does not send affliction to you, in amounts you can bear, because God is *not* the source of the testing. "Let no man say, when he is tested, he is tested of God," James, the brother of Jesus, writes. (James 1:13)

The world would say you're just supposed to accept trials, because, after all, they come from God. Psalm 34 says, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him from all of them." Yesterday afternoon, as I was getting sick again, I "happened" to open my Bible to 2 Timothy. "Persecutions and sufferings I endured," Paul wrote, "but out of them all the Lord delivered me." (2 Tim. 3:11) Now, if He put you into these trials and tribulations, these suffering and persecutions, why would He also deliver you from them? Satan brings the temptation; God provides the escape.

Yes, the Bible says, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." But it was Job, not the Lord, who said this. It was Satan, not the Lord, who took away. And God strongly reproves Job for thinking he had it all figured out, based on what he could see. "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? . . . Where you there when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (Job 38:4)

Job is held up as someone to be imitated, for patience in suffering. His true example to us comes at the end, however, when he repents of his own words and reasoning. "I have [rashly] uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know . . . I had heard of You [only] by the hearing of the ear, but now my [spiritual] eye sees You. Therefore I loathe [my words] and abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:3-6)

I benefit from what others teach. I even benefit from the experiences of others. I hope to share what I've learned with you! But we first have to be able to evaluate whether man's words — including mine — line up with God's words. We can only do that if we ourselves know His Word and can spot imitations — or "another spirit" and "another Jesus" of which Paul warns us. He says, "Pattern yourselves after me [follow my example]." But he doesn't leave it there. "Pattern yourselves after me as I imitate and follow Christ." (1 Corin. 11:1) Christ is our example. We imitate the Father by imitating Christ, for Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father."

Do we imitate what we've heard, even if it sounds good, saying, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away?" As I sat in pain, I read, "As for you, continue to hold to the things that you have learned and of which you are convinced, knowing from Whom you learned [them]." (2 Tim. 3:14) Not man, not in imitation of man, even Godly ones, but from the Lord Himself. From His Word. He says, "I am the Lord that heals you." (Exodus 15:26) He says, "I will take away sickness from your midst." (Exodus 23:25)



6-12-04

Equipped for Holiness

7:33 a.m. I woke up, groggy. I went to bed not knowing what I was going to write for this program, and I woke up not knowing. It did seem that all the songs on the radio had these words: “Holy, holy, holy,” or “Holy is Your Name,” or “Blessed be the Name of the Lord; you are holy.” And I realized that Paul had played “Holy, Holy, Holy” on last week’s program. Was the Lord trying to get something across to me?

Holy. It’s one of those words we hear all the time, but what does it mean? I decided to do a word study and see where it led. I looked up the first reference to holy, in Exodus, when the Lord spoke to Moses out of the burning bush. “Remove the shoes from your feet, for the ground on which you stand is holy ground.” (Exodus 3:5) I kept reading – until I got to Exodus 3:13: Moses asked God His name, so he could tell his people. “I AM WHO I AM and WHAT I AM, and I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE; and He said, You shall say this to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you!”

Of course, we know that God is the Great I AM. But something new occurred to me: every time we say “I AM” – I am sick, I am broke, I am tired – we are using God’s name. Shouldn’t that make us more careful about what we say after we say “I AM?” Could it be that there’s power in what we say we are?

I thought about something Mitch had said a couple days before. “Satan can’t change who we are. All he can do is try to convince us that we’re *not* what we are.”

On my front step a few weeks ago, I noticed a little world going on at my feet. Four ants were toting a giant leaf. I thought, “No one’s ever told them they can’t move that leaf. They just do it.” They didn’t stand there, looking at that leaf, saying, “Oh, man, look at the size of that thing. Look at the size of me. Even with help, there is no way I could move this.” Then they’d just stand there, and never know that they could have moved that thing. I imagined saying, “Hey, guys! Don’t you know who you are? You’re ants! You can do this. You were built to do this!”

Someone came to my house last Saturday because she was afraid that something had happened to me and my kids. In her mind, it made perfect sense – because it could happen. I told her not to assume the worst. “I can’t help it,” she said. “Yes, you can,” I said. I didn’t want to agree with something that ran counter to the Word; “Fear not,” He says. “You’re not human if you don’t fear,” some say. Hadn’t I myself more than once feared that Dain could be taken if he got out of my sight in a grocery store?

But is this the way God intended for us to live? The Lord tells us that He did not give us a spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind. Adam did not know fear until he made one certain choice. After he’d come to know the difference between good and evil, this is the very first thing he said: “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.” (Gen. 3:10)

Even if I don’t walk it out perfectly, I do know that fear is a choice – yes, a choice. Whenever God gives us an instruction, He is giving us a choice. You can obey and not fear – or disobey and fear. How do you make that choice? By filling your head with God’s promises, with what He says about you. I can choose to disagree with what my mind is telling me because I know what God says about me.

Fear can stop you dead in your tracks. It can make you forget who you are, and keep you from finishing the course God set out for you and set in you.

When I started this radio program a year ago, I paced back and forth outside, praying. I was afraid. I’d never done anything like this before. How was I qualified? But I’ve come to see that as you take that step, God equips you. As you obey, the power to do as you’re instructed begins to flow.

As Peter was obeying Jesus' instruction to "come," Peter himself released the power in that word. At the wedding in Cana, the water became wine as they were doing what Jesus told them to do. A blind man regained his sight as he washed in the pool of Siloam. Ten lepers were healed as they went to show themselves to the priest. Peter told a man to arise and walk, and as he got up, he was healed. In their attempting to obey, they released the power that made them able to obey.

Back to my word study of holy. I did find references to holiness – 820 of them, many naturally referring to God – to be venerated in His purity, majesty and glory! In the Amplified version, I saw synonyms for holy: consecrated, purified, set apart, dedicated, devoted and sanctified. And this word was not just used in reference to God. It speaks to us, and of us. From Exodus: "And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation." (Exodus 19:6) How? John 17 tells us. Jesus said, "Sanctify them by the Truth; Your Word is Truth. Just as You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And so for their sake and on their behalf I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified (dedicated, consecrated, made holy) in the Truth." (John 17:17-19)

I'm not telling you that you're holy. God is. The Great I AM is, when you are in the truth of His Word. Feeling weak? Say, "I AM strong in the Lord." Feeling sick? Say, "I AM healed." Feeling lost? Say, "I AM saved." Feeling defeated? Say, "I AM victorious." Feeling worried, about writing a Desert Ministries story, perhaps? Say, "I AM not afraid." Doesn't "feel" like the truth? As you say it, watch out. For as you say it, as you step out of the boat, you will walk not into the water, but on top of it.



6-19-04

A Father Who Can and Will

Tomorrow is Father's Day. A day we set aside to honor our fathers.

Honor. I have a pretty good idea how to honor my earthly father, but how do I honor my heavenly Father? What brings Him glory?

I was thinking about my own earthly father yesterday. He had no real example to follow in his own father, who was an abusive alcoholic. But he had a good heart; and it told him to give. And give and give and give. I was blessed. Without realizing it, he was imitating our heavenly Father.

Do we know that God is a giver? We know He is able, but do we know He is willing? Jesus said, "Trust in God . . . therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them." (Mark 11:24) If we must believe that we receive when we pray in order to receive, must we not first know that He will give what He can give?

F.F. Bosworth put it this way: "It seems to me that God would rather have us doubt His ability than His willingness. I would rather have a man who is in trouble say to me, 'Brother Bosworth, I know you would help me if you could' (doubting my ability) than to say, 'I know you can, but I have no confidence in your disposition to help me.'"

If my father told me he was going to send me some money, I would thank him in advance of actually receiving it, because I believed him. I know that he is able to help, he is willing to help, and he is ready to help. I would believe I was going to get that money before I ever saw it. And why is he ready to help? Because he's my father, and he loves me. Plain and simple.

It's that simple with our heavenly Father, too, although we try to make it much harder. We make it hard for God to give to us, when we don't believe He wants to and is ready to! He has made so many promises. "He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." (Hebrews 11:6) His eyes "run to and fro," looking for someone to bless." (2 Chronicles 16:9) "Ask and you shall receive." (Luke 11:9) "If you, being evil (human), know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask?" (Luke 11:13)

Yes, God is a giver. He gave His Son. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” (John 3:16) Why did He give His Son? Because He loved us. Because He is and always has been our Father.

Some refer to the “God of the Old Testament” and the “God of the New Testament,” as if He were different entities. He hasn’t changed. It’s us who have changed. He has always called Himself Our Father; it wasn’t until Jesus came that we began calling Him Father. The Lord’s Prayer, which is now so accepted, was almost heretical when He said it. Its first words were “Our Father.” Jesus referred to the far-off God of the Old Testament as His Father and Our Father. And it got Him into plenty of trouble. The first time Jesus spoke of His Father, this was the reaction: “This made the Jews more determined than ever to kill Him; because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but He actually was speaking of God as being His own Father.” (John 5:17)

Jesus was claiming relationship with God. And this was the very reason He came – that we might have relationship with the Father. Where the Old Covenant, the Old Testament, the old relationship seemed to be dominated by God’s power, the New Covenant, the New Testament, the new relationship is dominated by God’s heart – His willingness. His old names illustrated His power, his sovereignty. His new names – Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace, Everlasting Father – illustrate His heart, His love. The Old Testament shows what He can do; the New Testament shows what He wants to do, what He will do, what He is eager to do. To give good gifts to His children. Heal them. Save them. Bless them.

God has always been a giver. He didn’t change. We did, through our relationship to Jesus, as His brothers and sisters. We turned from servants into children. Not through our obedience, but through Christ’s obedience. “The chastisement needful to obtain our peace was upon Him.” (Isaiah 53:5) And the Father planned our way of salvation long before we set ourselves on a path of destruction. Jesus Our Savior was there from the beginning, “a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world.” (1 Peter 19-20)

So, for this Father’s Day, I ask again, “How do we honor our Heavenly Father? How do we give Him the glory?” Some people would say that we give Him the glory when we give Him the credit. But this again speaks of His ability, not His heart. A Father feels our afflictions. He is with us in them. (Isaiah 63:9) When my child is in pain, I am in pain. Jesus wept with compassion over the death of Lazarus because He knew His friends’ pain. (John 11:34-36)

Jesus said a blind man would be healed so that God could be glorified. (John 9:3) Was it to show His power — or His grace and mercy? Was it to show His strength — or His love? This is how He is glorified: When His children are freed from their afflictions, when they are healed, saved and delivered. And not because His power is involved, but because His heart is involved. This is the glory of God, the honor of God: that His children know not just the God who can because He is the Almighty, but the Father who will because He is Love.



7-10-04

Spiritual Sight: Meditate on the Word

I’m going to do things a bit differently today. When thoughts for today started coming my way, I could see that I’d have so much to say that I’d have to break it into two parts, which really suits my purposes well, anyway. Next week, we’ll be at Sorenson Living Center, and I’m really seeing something special happen there, as a continuation of what I believe will be started today. Next week, we’ll be out among a larger number of people than usual. They’ll actually see us, whereas most of you today are listening. Both times are very special. Hearing and seeing are both important, and they work together.

We know that faith comes by hearing, and hearing, by the Word of God. We are told to walk by faith and not by sight — physical sight, that is. For most of us, the spiritual realm is unseen. And it’s probably better that way, since we might be overwhelmed by it. Most of the times angels have appeared, people were afraid. How do we know that? Because the first words out of the mouths of these heavenly beings were, “Do not be afraid.” What must angels look like, if they inspire such a reaction? Maybe we don’t really

want to see angels! Not with our human eyes, anyway. Not with our physical eyes.

We know that there is more than one kind of seeing. Jesus said that He came to give sight to the blind, and He did that, physically and spiritually. He still does that today, for He is the same yesterday, today and forever. He healed the eyes of the blind, and He called the heartless Pharisees blind. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! Woe to you, blind guides!” (Matt. 15:23)

Yes, there are different kinds of sight. Job, who thought his afflictions came from God, finally saw the reasoning error that arose from not physically or spiritually seeing what was really going on. “I have [rashly] uttered what I did not understand . . . but now my [spiritual] eye sees You. Therefore I loathe [my words] and abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:3-6)

We are so dominated by what we see. Our sight is rightly very important to us. I thought about that as I was pulling out my driveway yesterday. Wouldn't we feel trapped without our ability to see? Wouldn't it be like captivity? 11 percent of people over age 65 are afflicted with macular degeneration; it is the leading cause of blindness in the elderly. Is this one more way that our elders can feel trapped, and bound? In fact, that's how Isaiah 61 refers to it — as being “bound.” Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would proclaim “liberty to the captives and opening of the eyes of those who are bound.” In Luke 4, Jesus Himself said that restoring sight was one of seven things He had been anointed to do. And when John the Baptist sent some of his followers to ask Jesus if He were truly the One that had been promised, Jesus used the restoration of sight as evidence. “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the good news (the Gospel) preached to them.” (Luke 7:22)

Did you notice that Jesus told them to tell John what they had seen and heard? He knew the power of physical sight. But it would take spiritual “in-sight” to realize what those things meant. John had the frame of reference to interpret what Jesus' restoring physical sight meant.

Our senses of sight and hearing can function to our gain or to our loss. We are so affected by what we see and hear that we have to pay close attention to what we take in. And we do take it in. “The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is sound, your entire body will be full of light.” (Matthew 6:22) Your eye can light up your whole body, by what it takes in. But the eye can also darken the body. “But if your eye is unsound, your whole body will be full of darkness.” (Matthew 6:23)

I am quite aware of this. I watch very little secular TV because of it. I know that what I see, I essentially experience. We know that children who have witnessed a tragedy or have seen someone abused feel as if they had been the victims. It traumatizes them.

I also know that the images I see stay with me. I can't “unsee” them, once I see them. So I'm careful about what I put into my heart through my eye. And, being a visual learner, I remember pictures better than sounds — good or bad pictures. I can quote Scripture only because I can see the words in my head. Hearing them spoken fills me with faith, but seeing them is way I remember them.

The Word itself tells us to keep the Word in front of our eyes. Proverbs 4 tells us to attend to the Father's words this way: “Let them not depart from your sight.” Then it says to keep them in the center of your heart. It seems that we get them into our heart by first keeping them in our sight.

I want you to think about that until next week — and think about this . . . after Proverbs 4 tells us to keep His words in our sight and therefore in our heart, it goes on to say this about those words: “They are life to those who find them, healing and health to all their flesh. Keep and guard your heart with all vigilance and above all that you guard, for out of it flow the springs of life.” (Prov. 4:23)



Spiritual Sight: See Your Deliverer

Last week, I spoke of both hearing and seeing. They are so interrelated. What we hear, we see, in our mind's eye. If I told you a story, you would picture what was happening, as if you could actually see it. The audience here at Sorenson can see me, but you listeners at home cannot. Yet you probably have some picture in your mind about what we're doing, as we're talking.

And you trust that I am here, right? Even though you can't see me? You're operating in a kind of faith, believing that there is a body behind this voice. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing, by the word of God. (Romans 10:17) But what is faith? It is the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1) You can't see faith, but you can see its operation. You can't see the wind, but you can see what it does. You can't see the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, but you can see what He does. "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8)

Jesus healed those who could not physically see, for He knows how we depend on our sight. But He called us to greater "in-sight" – to spiritual sight that allows us to walk by faith and not by physical sight. And one of the ways we do that – walk by faith – is to keep His Word in front of our physical eyes until we can see it in with our spiritual eyes. "Let them not depart from your sight. Keep them in the center of your heart. They are life to those who find them, and healing and health to all their flesh." (Prov. 4)

Meditate on the word day and night, we are told (Joshua 1:8). I've been meditating on this word, from 2 Chronicles 20: "The Lord says this to you: Be not afraid or dismayed at this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. . . . Take your positions, stand still, and see the deliverance of the Lord [Who is] with you." Rejoice before you see your deliverance. See your deliverance. See your Deliverer.

Your Deliverer. If you really saw Him, what would happen? If we really saw what Jesus looked like on the cross, would it overwhelm us? Many who saw the movie *The Passion* were moved, and horrified, and stricken by what He endured, how He was beaten. But He wasn't disfigured by beatings alone. He was disfigured by the sin He took, by the diseases He took, by the infirmities He took, by the curse He took. "Surely He has borne our griefs (sicknesses, weaknesses, and distresses) and carried our sorrows and pains [of punishment]." (Isaiah 53:4) He became a curse for us, Galatians 3:13 tells us, so that all curses were upon Him for our redemption. Deuteronomy 28 names dozens of curses – including sickness and disease – that Jesus bore: pestilence, consumption, fever, inflammation, boils, tumors, scurvy, itch, madness, blindness, dismay of mind and heart, and "every sickness and every affliction which is not written in this Book." He bore them all! No wonder He wasn't recognizable as a man. Can you imagine Him with every disease and affliction and infirmity known to man?

Perhaps that is too much for us to bear, to imagine what He endured. I know that I realized recently that I was having trouble thinking about Jesus having borne my infirmities because I hated the idea that He might have suffered on my account, that I did this to Him, in some way. I didn't want to see Jesus take my pains because I didn't want to "add" to His suffering. But the thing is, He already took my sins, my infirmities, my diseases, my sicknesses, my pains. It is done. "It is finished," He said. He took these things for you; let Him have them! He already suffered. He will not suffer more when you give your sorrows and pains and afflictions to Him. The sin and corruption and curse of the whole world – including you – were upon Him.

So, I'm asking you to see your affliction, your condition on Him, whatever it may be. Imagine that on Jesus. It is there. You are not giving it to Him. He took it. He endured it. He bore it. He withstood it. "By His stripes, we were healed." (Isaiah 53:5, 1 Peter 2:24)

Those of you who cannot see me, you still believe that I'm here, right? You cannot see God, and yet you talk to Him, right? I'm asking you to use those same powers of faith to imagine what I'm saying. Look to Jesus. Look to the unseen – look to what you

cannot see. See Jesus. See him with your affliction. See it in your mind's eye before you ever see it with your physical eye. Smith Wigglesworth once ministered healing to a blind woman. He would not let her open her eyes until she could see, in her imagination, in her spirit. Until she could "see" with her eyes shut.

Close your eyes, you here at Sorenson who can see me, and you out there who can only hear me. Close your eyes and see Jesus with your condition, whatever it is. He bore it. He took it. It is finished. See it on Him. See it. It is God's will for you to have this, to be freed, for He has already done the work.

Where can you best picture Him as He began to take your sin, your diseases, your pains, your sorrows? Do you see Him in the darkness of the garden, as He began to sweat His precious redeeming blood? Do you see Him on the road to the cross? Do you see Him hanging on the cross? Coming down from it? Taking your sin and disease to hell?

See it. See it. See it. Mediate on it until you can see it. Day and night, if you must. And thank the Lord when you see it in your heart and in your mind, for when that happens, you will see it in your life. You will open your eyes, and you will see that it has been done. Amen and amen and amen! Those who trust in the Lord shall not be disappointed! (Romans 5:5) Thank You, Lord. Thank You, Lord. Thank You, Lord!



7-24-04

"Tell Them Again"

Father in heaven, I ask in Jesus' name that You guide me and my words, and that you speak through me. Decrease me, that You may increase.

All week long, this one particular word has been popping up all over the place. No matter what else I try to think about, there it is. My friends talk about it. I read about it. I cry because of it. It's huge. It's fundamental. It's a basic tenet of Christianity. I could see why God wants it talked about. But I protested. "Lord, they know this. They've heard it 100 times." He said, "Tell them again."

Dain and I were reading a book called *How Much is a Million?* It illustrates for kids the unimaginable numbers of a million, a billion, or a trillion. A million kids standing on each other's shoulders, for example, would reach past the moon. A child can picture that. Or, to count to a million without stopping would take 23 days. Counting to a billion would take 95 years!

We started figuring other things out, stopping once in a while, as usual, to hug and say, "I love you." That got Dain wondering how many times I had told him, "I love you." He figured 30 times a day. That meant 900 times a month, or about 11,000 times a year, or about 75,000 times since he was born. We laughed! "I've told you that I love you 75,000 times!" I thought a moment, and said, "I guess you should know that I love you, huh?"

It resonated with me. I remembered a question I'd asked earlier in the week. How many times will God tell you what He wants you to hear? I once heard someone say that God should only have to tell us something once. That may be true, but He goes beyond what is strictly necessary. "Tell them again," He said to me.

Last night, as I was reading in my car, I asked the Lord, "What should I talk about?" as if I didn't know. I was avoiding it. Something caught my eye — flowers and plants across the road, with a sign that said, "50% off." A few days earlier, I'd said aloud, "I'd really like to have some plants for my empty containers." I love flowers, begonias especially. Surely no one was still selling them, in late July. "50% off." Dain and I went to check them out. Most were sad-looking. I said, "They should give these things away," I said to the woman next to me. She said, "They are. They're free." We took home enough flowers to fill all my empty pots. We kept marveling at how we'd found perfect plants among all those wilting, brown specimens. For free. And not just any flowers, but begonias.

Some say that we must work and strive and travail to get the good things of God. Be perfect, in other words. Yet the Lord has said that His blessings will overtake us. We don't have to run after them. They come running after us – when we seek Him and not them. Deuteronomy 28 says: “If you will listen diligently to the voice of the Lord your God, being watchful to do all His commandments which I command you this day, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you if you heed the voice of the Lord your God. Blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the field.”

Blessings shall come upon us if we heed the voice of the Lord, if we are watchful to do His commandments. When asked, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus, our New Covenant, the fulfillment of the Law, said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind.” (Luke 10:27) He was quoting Deuteronomy 6, the same book that assures us God's blessings will overtake us when we heed His voice!

If we are to heed His voice, He must be continually speaking to us. And what is He saying? In the New Testament alone, there are more than 300 references to love. 300 times should be enough, right? But does God stop there? Since God cannot change, and Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever, He is still speaking love. If He spoke of love 100 times a year while in the flesh, He's spoken of love at least 200,000 times in the last 2,000 years!

How many times did He speak love to me this week alone? Was He going to let me forget it? No. And every time we speak His words, we are speaking for Him. Every time we move in love, we are moving for Him; we are loving Him. “As you have done to the least of these, you have done to Me.” (Matt. 25:45) I asked Him not long ago, “How do we love you, Lord, when we haven't seen You?” Immediately, I heard, “By loving others.” I thought of His question to Peter: “Do you love Me? Feed my sheep.” (John 21:15-17) He said that the second great commandment is like the first, which is to love God with everything you have. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matt 22:37-40)

We know His love by loving others. When we walk in love, we walk with *Him*. I can say this no other way than to tell you that I know when I'm walking in love, because I feel like the Lord is not only with me, but in me. And I know that's true, for God is love, and God is a spirit, the Bible tells us. And the same Spirit, the Holy Spirit, our great Comforter, lives in us. “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God,” the Apostle Paul asked, “and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Corin. 3:16)

So, when I thought about what to write for this program, I knew that love had to “enter in.” I could not escape it – just as we cannot escape His love, even if we tried! 300 times, or 200,000 times, or a million, billion or a trillion times, the Lord will keep telling you that He loves you until you “get” it – and get all of it. If it takes 23 days or 95 years – or the blink of an eye as you look up across the road and see that flowering blessings have overtaken you.

Yes, free flowers are nice. It's just another way I see God touching my life. But what is the real blessing? I heard a song this week that started, “If I could have but one thing . . .” I filled in the blank: “It would be You.” The real blessing is the Lord. It is His presence. It is He Himself. “Tell them again,” He said. “The real blessing is the Lord.”



7-31-04

Who Am I?

You've heard the story of Moses, when God told him to lead his people out of captivity. Moses must have thought, “I've been wandering around the desert all this time. How am I qualified to help anyone else find a way out?”

Maybe he didn't consider that he knew what the desert was like, so he would understand what the others felt. He asked, “Who am I?”

They won't believe me. Besides, I don't speak well. Send someone else." The Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? . . . It is I, the Lord. Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and will teach you what you shall say." (Exodus 4:10-13)

My spirit has been bringing something up all week, but my head's been asking, "Who am I? I can't do this!" I said that again as I sat down to write. "Lord, I know that I said, 'Send me, send me,' but I can't do this!" I felt Him saying, "That's a good place to start!"

So, you've heard the story of Moses. This is a story about a woman named Annie, whose sister, Clare, had always despised her. She wasn't sure why. Clare had decided to stop talking to Annie. One spring day, Annie visited her parents' house while Clare was there. Clare became and remained angry that their parents had allowed this uncomfortable situation. Annie tried writing a letter to her sister, but found that it only stirred up old hurts. One morning, the Lord told her, "Write it now." She prayed over it, and mailed it. It arrived the same day that her mother, knowing nothing of the letter, decided to broach the subject herself. They later discovered that they had both told Clare the same thing, on the same day: "Carrying this around in your heart will only hurt you."

Annie thought of this: "Not forgiving someone is like taking poison and hoping the other person will die." When we are hurt, we fume, we plot, we plan what we'll say, and we seek justice. It is with good reason, however, that God says, "Vengeance is Mine." (Deut. 32:35, Rom. 12:19) We were never meant to carry around the burden of unforgiveness.

Just when Annie had this all figured out, she got an unexpected call. A client had done something thoughtless and hurtful and unjust. Usually hard to offend, Annie felt anger rising inside her. Left unchecked, that anger soon turned to heaviness, and she felt as if all the rejection she'd ever known had been piled on top of her.

She sought the Lord to escape the heaviness. "Lord, You want us to forgive. So help me forgive! Help me forgive, as You have forgiven me." She thought of Jesus' words, and said, "Lord, I forgive him, for he knows not what he does." (Luke 23:34) She tried saying that she forgave him in spite of what she felt. "I'll say it until I feel it. I forgive him, I forgive him, I forgive him." What she really wanted to do was forget. It wouldn't hurt if she could forget.

People carry around a lifetime of unforgiveness and pain. I vividly remember times I've been hurt, and I'll bet that you do, too. Every time we remember, we feel the pain all over again. Is this what the Lord wants for you? For whose sake do you forgive?

Jesus said, "When you stand praying, if you have ought against any, forgive him . . . If you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive you." (Mark 11:25-26) That seems just, and God is just. Jesus spoke of a man who was forgiven much but who refused to forgive a fellow servant of his small debts. The tormentors came for him. (Matt. 18:23-34) "Yes, Lord," Annie said, "that is justice. But what of mercy? Justice or mercy?"

Really, it would have been just if the Father had let us pay our own debts, suffer the separation from Him that we ourselves chose. We ask forgiveness not just for our particular sins, but from our sin, our condition – that pride, that desire for independence, that unwillingness to be a part of Him and His will. "Not My will, but Your will," Jesus prayed. (Luke 22:42)

It occurred to Annie that all offense, what we take as personal offense, comes from a concern for self. "Die to self daily," the Apostle Paul said. (1 Corin. 15:31) "Deny yourself and follow Me," Jesus said. (Matt. 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23) Follow Me. Do as I did. "Love as I have loved you." (John 15:12) Do we love others when we see them as separate from ourselves? Jesus wanted us to know that He is in the Father, and the Father is in Him, and they are in us. If we are truly joined, a part of the same body, how can we feel personal offense when one member hurts another? Or be jealous when one has success, or gifts from the Lord that we do not have? Would an eye be envious of the feet when they got new shoes? Would I be mad at my finger if it poked me in the eye?

How long must we carry around old hurts? A day? A week? 20, 30, 60 years? Isn't it time that love released our debtors from their obligations, that we forgive as the Lord forgives? That we put the sins of others with ours, into the sea of forgetfulness? (Micah 7:18) "I will remember their sins no more," He said. (Jer. 31:34, Heb. 8:12, Heb. 10:17) If we are to forgive, we are to forget.

“Bless those who curse you,” Annie suddenly remembered. (Luke 6:28) She’d done that the day Clare had cursed her with a cold glare. The rising bitterness in her heart had been quelled as she prayed, “Touch her heart, Lord.”

“Bless those who curse you.” She thought of her client. “Lord, pour blessings on him. Bring him joy, and peace. Be with him.” Something rose in her spirit, some kind of unexpected joy. She felt like laughing. The pain was gone.

“Bless those who curse you.” This is not simply some upside-down law. We forget our hurts when we pray for others. We forget ourselves when we ask that others be blessed. Our forget our concern for our “self.” We ask blessings upon the body, and all the members – especially the heart – rejoice.

Who am I to tell you this? Not Moses, that’s for sure. But my middle name is Annette. Annie, for short.



8-7-04

Stuff Happens

I originally intended to write something “light and fluffy” today, or even read a Psalm, and give you all a break from “Deep Thoughts by Lori Thomte.”

But, you know, life isn’t all light and fluffy. And “deep” doesn’t have to mean depressing. We can be joyful even when we aren’t necessarily happy. There is a difference. Circumstances can make you happy. Relationships can make you joyful. One is about things; the other is about people. Both can bring sadness, for sure. But when our hope is in the Lord, who cannot disappoint or fail, the relationship we have with Him can bring us joy in the true sense.

Circumstances. “Stuff” that happens to us. The longer we live, the more “stuff” we get. We accumulate it, in the form of memories. I spoke of this last week, when I told how a client/friend had hurt me. I knew that if I could forget it, I could forgive him. I discovered that praying blessings on him made me forget myself, and my own concerns.

Unfortunately – and this is why I’m speaking of it again – “someone” kept trying to make me remember what I’d forgotten. What I’d put into the sea of forgetfulness, where the God who “will remember their sins no more” puts *our* transgressions. (Jer. 31:34, Heb. 8:12, Heb. 10:17) As the book of Micah says, “He will cast their sins into the depths of the sea.” (Micah 7:19)

“Someone” kept reminding me of the hurt, so I kept feeling it. Thankfully, I also eventually remembered something else. “Lord, I know that I wouldn’t be facing this if You didn’t already know that I could get through it.” That is not to say that He brings hardship on us. Why would the Deliverer deliver you from your afflictions if He were the author of them? Wouldn’t He be a house divided against itself? (Matt. 12:25, Mark 3:25, Luke 11:17)

Yet so many people believe this. Some say that God tests us to see if He can trust us. Let me just ask this: How could a God who knows how the world will end be ignorant of what you can or will do? If anything, He allows the “tests” that Satan presents us because He wants us to see what He already knows – that we can get through them – through Him. Satan, however, who is not omniscient, doesn’t know these things. So he tests them. He tries them, to see if we’ll “hold.”

Have the faith that God has in you. The fact that He has confidence in us should give us confidence. If you’re being tested, know that you can get through it. Keith Moore puts it like this: If you see a contender in the ring, you know that you can defeat him, or he wouldn’t be there at all. If you couldn’t defeat him, God would have taken him out before you even got there.

My opponent last week was unforgiveness. Jesus told us to forgive “seventy times seven.” (Matt. 8:22) That’s a figurative expression, but taken literally, that’s 490 times. Over a lifetime, we might need to forgive that many different offenses. But perhaps we also need to forgive 490 times for the same offense – every time the incident resurfaces in our minds. Within the last week alone, a hundred similar thoughts must have arisen that I had to conquer. Maybe it will take me 490 tries before I defeat those thoughts. Maybe I shouldn’t condemn myself if I need that many attempts to take them captive to Christ. Did I instantly trust Him, for example, just because I’d made the decision to do so? Or did it take some repetition? I was harassing myself by saying, “I should be able to forgive. I should stop hurting.” About the 50th time I tried to forgive, I found that I had turned “bless him, Lord” into “Lord, dump blessings on his head.” That doesn’t sound very nice, does it? Well, 50 down, 440 times to go!

“Dump blessings on his head.” That makes me think of this little bird I saw at an outdoor café. I had a bakery roll that was round and hard, like a ball. I wanted to feed the bird, but I knew that I’d have to pick pieces from it; I couldn’t just launch the whole thing at him. A huge rock of bread coming at him would hardly have seemed like a blessing! Imagine the Lord rolling up all the blessings you’re supposed to get and heaving them at you. No, He gives us portions of our blessings as we can handle them, as we can use them. In the same way, He doesn’t let this big ball of challenges come our way unless He already knows that we can handle them.

I knew this, as I told the Lord, “I wouldn’t be facing this opponent of unforgiveness unless You already knew I could defeat it.” But how? Through Him, yes, “through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philip. 4:13) But how?

As we seek concrete, objective solutions to our struggles, we often forget that He Himself, as a person, a divine Person, is The Way. (John 14:6) He Himself. Not what He can do, but He Himself. If Jesus were physically standing in front of you, would you think anything but “wow” or “awesome” – right before you hit your knees, that is? Would you be thinking about some past offense? Wouldn’t His mere presence take away every hurt you felt? He has promised to dry every tear. And I believe that. (Rev. 7:17, Rev. 21:4)

Jesus told us to love God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind, and all our strength. (Mark 12:30) Doing that pushes out every other thought. Often, we use our own means to try to “escape” our thoughts and feelings. Addictive behaviors, drugs, alcohol, depression, detachment, overeating – the list is long. But this kind of distraction is not helpful. It brings other miseries. We can do as the Apostle Paul suggests: “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good report . . . meditate on these things.” (Philip. 4:8) Even if we only thought about what is true, that would include the whole Bible! And getting through it wouldn’t just be distracting, it would be healing.

We were not created to struggle. We were created to walk and talk with the Lord. To be with Him. What is Jesus’ name? Immanuel: God With Us. Yesterday morning, I left my hurt with Jesus, because He took our sorrows; He bore our pains. But more than that, I decided to simply sit at His feet, as Mary did, when she chose the “better part.” (Luke 10:42) I’ll listen to Him, and not those pestering thoughts. And I’ll remember that I have 490 chances to get it right.



8-21-04

His Name is His Promise

You’ve heard pastors say, “I’m preaching myself happy.” The last time I wrote for this program, I wrote myself happy.

I followed my own advice, by reminding myself that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ, so I should stop condemning myself. (Romans 8:1) I saw that we’re given many opportunities to forgive for the same thing, so again we should not condemn ourselves if we can’t do it right away. (Matt. 8:22) I remembered that Jesus took our sorrows and pains, so we don’t have to bear them. (Isaiah 53:3-5) I remembered that God wouldn’t allow a difficulty to present itself to us if we couldn’t handle it, so we should have the confidence in ourselves that He has in us. (1 Corin. 10:13) I remembered to think on good things, not as a distraction, but because doing so is healing. (Philip. 4:8) I saw that spending time with Jesus dries every tear, and that seeking Him

instead of solutions actually is the solution. (Rev. 7:17, Rev. 21:4; John 14:6)

Later, I thought of something else, something in addition to what I'd spoken about. The Lord does have promises that apply to many situations, but the one that covers them all is His promise that He will not forsake us but will be with us. (Heb. 13:5) "Fear not, for I am with you." (Isaiah 41:10) Again, as I asked last time, what was Jesus to be called? Immanuel: God With Us. The Great Comforter was given to us – the Person was given to us – who would never leave us. And Jesus said He'd be with us until the very end of the age. (Matt. 28:20)

I think that God has given us specific promises to show us that certain things are taken care of, as examples of everything that He's provided. "Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' . . . For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." (Matthew 6:31-32) Specific things are mentioned: clothing and food. Sometimes we need to have certain things identified when we are most worried about them. But the greatest promise is the one that promises His presence. (John 13:16) Would you rather have individual incidences of comfort, or the Comforter Himself, the source of all comfort?

In the Bible, God refers to Himself by names that are called "covenant names." Each declares that He is the provider of human need: Jehovah-nissi: God My Banner; Jehovah-Shalom: God My Peace; Jehovah-Jireh: God My Provider; Jehovah-El Shaddai: God Our Supplier; Jehovah-Rapha: God My Healer; Jehovah-M'Kadesh: God My Sanctifier. And there are more . . .

I stop for a moment and think about a baby in his mother's arms. As she carries him around, she covers everything he needs, takes him wherever she goes. She clothes him, feeds him, helps him sleep, soothes him, talks to him, rocks him, teaches him, answers his cries, cleans him, loves him. She is his comforter, provider, protector. But it is not just what she does for him that he needs. It is she herself. Her love prompts her to provide everything he needs. But hand that baby to someone else for a while, and the baby becomes fussy. He doesn't just need what she can do. He needs her.

What is a child's greatest fear? I would dare to say that it is losing a beloved parent – not because the child sees her as a provider, or protector, or even healer – but because the child needs her. There's a certain stage in development where it is said that a child does not differentiate between himself and his mother. He does not distinguish himself as separate from her. She is part of him, in his perception. I think that's interesting. I'm not sure when he moves out of that stage, but I believe that to a child, the greatest promise a mother can ever make is that she'll always be there. "I'm not going anywhere. You'll never lose me." What do children of divorce need to hear? "I still love you. I'll never leave you."

Isn't this just like what the Lord promises? "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." (Joshua 1:5) Is there any greater promise, among all the exceeding great and precious promises? That we will always have Him? Doesn't that cover absolutely everything we need? He has given us Himself. What more could we need? Thank You, Lord!

There's something I always include when I pray for someone. I thank the Lord for loving them. I do that not only because I know He does, not only because I know that's the reason He'll take care of them, not only because they need to be reminded that He loves them. I do that because I know that His love in itself is the best gift. Could we have a better gift than God's love? I thank the Lord for the gift of Himself, of His Love. I thank the Lord for loving every one of you.

I have heard a Bible teacher say that God is justified in loving us because we have been made righteous through Christ. I know that he said this to reassure people that God loves them, because it's probably easier to imagine God loving someone who deserves it – as Jesus, the Perfect One, surely deserved it. But two things come to mind: 1) He loves you just as much as He loves Jesus (John 10:17-18); and 2) He loved you before you were made righteous through Jesus. He loved us, the Bible says, "While we were yet sinners." (Rom. 5:8) If this were not so, He wouldn't have sent Jesus to save us in the first place. We were lost and undeserving of His love, yet He loved us anyway. So much so that He made a Way for us to always be with Him, and not perish, but have everlasting life. He doesn't wait until we're perfect enough for Him to love us; He loves us enough to make a way for us to be perfected. He loves us enough to be the Way: Jehovah-Tsidkenu: God My Righteousness.

So, again, I thank the Lord for loving us. For being Love. For being everything we need. For being the Way. Thank You, Lord, for loving us, for loving everyone out there, but most of all for being the Great I AM. For being Jehovah-Shammah: The Abiding Presence.

But I tell you, surely I tell you, there is one name greater than all names, and it represents a greater covenant, a new and better promise. (Heb. 8:6) This name means “Jehovah Our Salvation.” It is Jesus, name above all names. (Philip. 2:9)



9-11-04

Open Our Eyes, That We May See

A couple days ago, Dain and I were heading to school, practicing his Bible verse for the week. He read, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.” (2 Corin. 5:17, NIV) I dropped him off at school, then drove to the parking lot where I work, and turned on the radio. I opened my Bible, landing exactly on 2 Corinthians, chapter 5. Then I noticed the song that was playing. It was one I’d never heard before, on a station I don’t usually listen to, but do you know what the lyrics were? “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come.”

I wasn’t sure why these three instances of the same verse seemed to be popping out at me, but I figured the Lord would show me at some point. I also kept hearing, “Workers together with Him.” That went through my head probably ten times a day for two weeks. I figured I was just stuck on it.

Anyway, I started thinking about this program – and the 9-11 theme – a few days ago. I wondered how I could speak to something so big, something that people far more learned than I had wrestled with. I thought about all the philosophers and theologians who have postulated about how God could allow tragedy and evil to befall us. Did I have an answer that they did not? What could I add? How could I help anyone deal with such pain and grief, and make sense of it? How could we reconcile such events with belief in a good and protecting God?

I would hazard a guess that every one of us could look back at one event that changed how we look at the world. For many people, that event was 9-11. For those in other generations, it was the experience of World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War; the day Kennedy was shot; the assassination of President Lincoln; the Civil War; the witnessing of the great evil that men are capable of. Others are plagued by illness and disease. In all these instances, people seem to realize the enormity of evil; in the case of 9-11, it was a very sudden realization.

But the forces behind this kind of evil are not new, no matter how suddenly they come into view. And it is our viewpoint that we’re talking about. We can look at the world and be informed by it, or we can look at God’s Word and be informed by it. It is not a blindness to what’s in the world that I’m talking about. It is not a Pollyanna approach to life, where you say the horrible stuff in the world is actually, in some convoluted way, good. We need to see with new eyes, with a different pair of eyes, into a world that’s beyond and higher than this one.

I’m not talking about taking consolation in the deaths of thousands of people because they are now in heaven. They left enormous pain behind. They may be in a better place, but their loved ones are left to grieve. I’m talking about this: we are in a spiritual battle, one that is far more powerful than the battles we see in the flesh. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Eph. 6:12)

I think of Elisha and his young servant, who had awakened to see them surrounded by enemies. Elisha said, “Fear not; for those with us are more than those with them.” The servant couldn’t see this, so Elisha asked the Lord to show him what was really there. “Open his eyes that he may see.” The Lord opened his eyes, and he saw that “the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about

Elisha.” (2 Kings 6:16-17) Elisha had known what was there, without seeing. He wanted his servant to see it, too, so he would not fear.

What do you see? Do you see, as many Americans do, a new dread, a new evil, a new threat? Do you feel a new fear? Has your view of the world changed because of what you’ve seen? Do you ask, “How and why does evil seem to triumph?” Well, I ask, “Have you ever heard the expression, ‘All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing?’” That isn’t from the Bible, but this is: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go then and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you, and behold, I am with you all the days to the close and consummation of the age.” (Matt. 28: 18-20)

Go then. That sounds like a responsibility. A scary responsibility. Why would the Lord entrust us with that? Wouldn’t it be better if the Lord just came down here and straightened everything out?

Oh, wait. He did.

“Ye are gods,” Jesus said. (John 10:34) I haven’t quite understood that, until now. We were created to have dominion, to create, to walk with Him. It has all gotten corrupted, but that was the intent – to have joy using our authority and His power. I have come to see that He wants us to feel what He does, to know the power and the love of reaching out to someone, and helping them. It is not just a responsibility. It is a privilege. It is a joy. He wants us to know that joy. “Workers together with Him.” “For if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” In Christ. Walking in Christ. Living in Christ. Letting His love and power and will flow through us. And we can’t do this sitting in our chairs.

Frustrated by and afraid of the world because of what you’ve seen? How do you see it? Do you see it falling in, with planes leveling buildings, with fear changing our lives, with illness stomping on us? Or do you see it as Elisha did, with hundreds of chariots all around us, ready to fight for us? Do you see it as Paul did, that “greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world”? (1 John 4:4)



9-25-04

Keep Your Eyes on the Standard

I took a break last night from my nonstop working to sit in the living room. Mitch was just starting to watch “The Apprentice.” I don’t usually watch it, but I was tired, and it felt good to sit in one place and do nothing. I’d been running myself ragged over the last few weeks. I’d considered writing a Cinderella story, the way I had felt so overworked. But no one was forcing me to work so hard. I choose to put my heart into work, doing the absolute best I can. Colossians says, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord and not for men.” (Colossians 3:23)

The show’s opening began. Words scrolled onto the screen. “It’s not personal. It’s just business.” It seems acceptable that people use one set of standards in their personal lives and another for their business lives. As if a job justified any kind of conduct.

“Work as for the Lord and not for men.” Doesn’t that tell us to use our hearts as well as our minds in all we do? Whether we’re working at a job, volunteering, cleaning the house, talking to one another, shouldn’t our hearts enter in? Even when doing so makes us vulnerable? For when we put our heart into something, we’re risking it. We’re not secure.

Yet security in this world may be only an illusion, in any case. A few years ago, I became ill, and no matter what I did, I stayed that way. Soon, other forms of “security” vanished. Money, marriage, family, friends, church, community, work.

Work. The thing that was once so scarce and is now so abundant that it’s distracting me. The last few weeks, I’ve been working every waking moment – and then some. I wasn’t sleeping well. I’d wake up, often with no specific worry, just a general uneasiness, a tension. I reminded myself, “Cast your cares upon the Lord, for He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7) But I kept thinking about what I had

to do.

At every stage of life, we have different worries, and different reasons for stress. Often, our stress boils down to a lack of control over our circumstances – a perception that we have no say in our lives, that we can't make it all work out, or that we've lost everything dear to us – our spouse, our things, our health, our mobility, our financial means. We become aware of our fragility, the tenuous state that is life. But what has changed? Weren't these things always possible? That is, it's not our mortality that actually changes as we get older; it's our awareness of it that changes.

We can hold a job and think we're secure. I've been hoping that my yearlong freelance job at an ad agency would turn into a permanent position. The way it is now, they could say tomorrow that they don't need me. But really, that could happen anyway. They've had many layoffs in the last few years.

"I'd like something just to be settled and stable," I told Mitch. But I know the reality of the world. I'm aware of the things that can happen. "All of life is tenuous," I told him. "I just happen to have become aware of it." Being aware has also led me to be thankful that I am where I am, and I'm doing what I'm doing. As busy as I can get, all I have to do to get some perspective is to think about four years ago – when I was doing nothing, because I was lying sick in bed. Now, as I'm walking around, often through halls filled with beautiful faces peering up at me from wheelchairs, I know that everything can change in a heartbeat.

But is this the "awareness" that God wants us to have? "Cast your cares upon the Lord, for He cares for you," Peter said. Jesus told us not to worry about what we will eat or drink or wear. "Consider the birds of the air. Neither do they toil nor do they spin. Yet your Father cares for them." (Matt. 6:25-26)

Well, in the middle of the night, when it's dark and you're tired and you're hurting and you're alone, your cares can seem pretty big. Two nights ago, unable to sleep, I wanted to jump out of bed and just spaz out – shake it off, groan in frustration, pull at my hair. I staggered out of bed and stretched my aching legs. Then I asked Mitch to pray over the abdominal pain I was having. But he knew there was more. There was mental distress, mental fatigue. He spoke quietly to me. He could have simply said not to think about work or what I had to do. He went further. He said, "Think about Jesus and everything He's done." Within five minutes, I was asleep.

What Jesus has done. What if we don't know what Jesus has done? It's time to learn. And then daily remind ourselves. What does He want for us? He wants peace. "My peace I give to you, and not as the world gives." (John 14:27) While our cares may loom large, it is the good and true things we are to think about. I got this example from Mitch, and I want you to try it: "Don't think about an elephant. Don't think about an elephant. Don't think about an elephant." Are you thinking about an elephant? Probably.

No, focus on Jesus. Keep your eyes on Jesus. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." (Prov. 4:23) "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:7) No matter what our circumstances – and they are different for everyone – the right thing to do is focus on Jesus. Peter might tell us the same thing: keep your eyes on Jesus when you're trying to walk on the water in the midst of a storm.

A few weeks ago, I had a glorious experience, which happened only because of a focus on Jesus. Ever since then, a million different things have tried to "tempt" me into losing my focus – and sinking. "Look at me: I'm a computer that doesn't work. Look at me: I'm wedding plans that haven't been made. Look at me: I'm a ton of work that you'll never get done. Look at me: I'm a mountain of dirty clothes. I'm boxes to unpack, and closets to be cleaned out, school clothes to buy, soccer games to watch, thank-you notes to write, clients to please, shirts to be ironed . . ." Yikes! The list of attention-getters goes on.

And the more tired I get, the harder it is to keep a good attitude. I want to complain about doing someone else's job, about being the only one working when all the "real" employees are golfing or having a party. But I remember: "work as for the Lord." I'm not doing this for them. I'm doing it for the Lord – and only with His strength. Life flows through Jesus. Restoration comes through Him. Peace and rest are His, and He makes them yours. "Come to me, all you that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you

rest.” (Matt. 11:28)

He is my rest. He is my strength. He is my standard. Business or personal.



10-10-04

A Voice in the Dark

It's easy to get lost when you're walking around in the dark.

A week ago, I was sitting in a Florida condo, jotting down some observations. I felt like I'd stumbled into a land of self-gratification. Or maybe I should say a “*World* of Self-Gratification.” Among all the pink and blue buildings, and giant wizards, giraffes, dinosaurs, and cartoon characters, we counted at least a dozen “worlds”: Disney World and Sea World, of course, but also Denim World, Bargain World, World of Sports, Orange World, Outlet World . . . and my personal favorite, Flea World. Never has it seemed more appropriate to “be in this world and not be of it”!

Walking around through all these worlds, I began to see things I didn't necessarily want to see. I saw people like lost sheep, like Jesus must have seen us. Looking everywhere, at home and away, for what would satisfy them, knowing that there was something missing but not sure what. Food? Entertainment? Thrills? Stuff, stuff and more stuff? How much money was spent vainly trying to pursue their own gratification? Solomon said, “I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity, a striving after the wind and a feeding on wind.” (Eccles. 1:14)

I felt a bit sad – and rather useless, as one mere person with a message in a “world” of people. But I followed where my heart led me, smiling at and chatting with people, fingering the cross around my neck to remind myself and to hint to them Who it is who wants to bring joy and warmth into their day.

I got plenty of opportunities to chat, as Mitch checked out the “amusements.” No, he wasn't stranding me on our honeymoon. The first “amusement” we encountered – “Revenge of the Mummy” – definitely took revenge on me. I knew I was in trouble when I read, “To prevent serious injury, keep your head firmly pressed against the headrest at all times.”

The ride started out fairly calmly. Then the car began to back up – and I do mean up. From that point on, I saw nothing. I only felt heat and water and wind – and twisting, flinging, dropping and shaking. I say that I saw nothing because I shut my eyes! In the dark, Mitch whispered, “Sweetie, are you okay?” I managed an answer in a few moments. “Yes,” I breathed quickly.

I got off, feeling grateful to have survived. My mind knew it was safe, but my body wasn't convinced! That's why, from then on, Mitch “Lori-tested” everything first.

Disney World the next day seemed wonderfully tame by comparison. We went on a cheesy ride through great film moments, with animatronic movie stars, whose most threatening words were, “That's some mighty wild country you're headed for.” Then we came to a scene from “America's most beloved children's classic,” according to our tour guide.

Ha! Whose idea of “beloved” is being scared by things that go bump in the night – like roller coasters and witches? “I'll get you, my pretty” aren't exactly comforting words. And those munchkins? And all those weird flowers and clothes and colors? Could they be the reason Dorothy wanted to go home? She seemed a lot happier when things stopped flying through the air and went back to boring black and white. It seems like the last ten minutes of the movie contain the real point, and yet everyone fixates on the colorful, dizzying parts of the movie.

Not me. I like boring. I like color, but I also like black and white. I like fantasy, but I also like reality. I enjoy frivolity, but I value truth. When it comes right down to it, I'm only at home when I'm pursuing something bigger than my own gratification. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it." (Matt. 16:24-25)

It seemed like the whole world was chasing bright lights but still walking around in the dark. "He who walks about in the dark does not know where he goes [he is drifting]." (John 12: 35) But Jesus said, "I have come as a Light into the world, so that whoever believes in Me may not continue to live in darkness." (John 12:46)

So, as I wrote in my journal a week ago, I determined to shine my light, even if it was little. "For what we preach is not ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves [merely] as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God Who said, Let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts so as [to beam forth] the Light for the illumination of the knowledge of the majesty and glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. However, we possess this precious treasure [the divine Light of the Gospel] in [frail, human] vessels of earth, that the grandeur and exceeding greatness of the power may be shown to be from God and not from ourselves." (2 Corinthians 4:5-7)

Less than 24 hours after thanking God that I could be His vessel, I was reminded of just how frail we human vessels are. Darkness opened its doors. Intense pain and nausea woke me. I began a weeklong ride hurtling backwards on an all-too-familiar physical and emotional roller coaster. I felt like my light had gone out. I felt faithless as I told God, "You have two choices: heal me or take me home." I confess this now, to my dear elder friends, only because I know that I am not alone in having feelings like these. And I confess it because I also know that this is not the end of the story – or the ride.

In the darkness of this week, I heard something that lit up a small space in me: Angels hearken to the voice of the word of God. Psalm 103 says that the voice of God's word puts ministering spirits into action, to do His commandments! Surely that voice can move our spirits. "My words are Spirit, and they are Life," Jesus said. (John 6:63)

Every morning, Mitch has been staggering out of bed to stand behind me and give voice to the Word of God. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away." I finish: "Behold, all things are made new." (2 Corin. 5:17)

Yes, it's easy to get lost when you're walking around in the dark. But then a voice whispers, "Sweetie, are you okay?" and you hear, "The Light shines on in the darkness, for the darkness has never overpowered it." (John 1:5)



10-16-04

Ageless Innocence

The curtain separating the two beds was pushed slowly back, the metal rings rattling on the top of the rod. A gently smiling face appeared around the edge of the fabric.

"Hi, Mary," a kind voice whispered.

Mary looked up from the book she was reading and motioned her friend into the small space. "Karen! Hi! You don't need to whisper."

"I wasn't sure. I thought she might be asleep."

Mary glanced at the still figure. "She is, but talking doesn't wake her. I actually think it's kind of soothing for her to hear voices around her."

“How are you doing?” Karen asked. “Have you gotten any sleep lately?”

“Some. She had kind of a wakeful night last night, but she’s doing better now. So I’ve had some rest, too. Sleep when they sleep, as they say.”

Karen peered over the railing. “They look so peaceful when they’re sleeping, don’t they?”

Mary just smiled.

Karen continued. “She’s so beautiful. And look at that skin. So soft, and as creamy-white as rose petals. She’s just gorgeous. Must run in the family!”

Mary laughed. “Well, thank you very much!”

“Say, on the way in, I saw Ted in the TV room. He looks a little ragged.”

“Yeah,” Mary said. “I think he’s a bit daunted by the new responsibility. Lots of changes, you know. And having a family isn’t cheap these days.”

“Sure, but it’s worth it, considering the joy you get in return, right? Mary?”

Mary drew a long breath. “I guess I’m a little scared, too. I don’t know if I can do this.”

“Oh, Mary, you’ll do absolutely fine. The Lord is right here to help you. And just take a look at that face. She is so sweet!”

Mary smiled. “Yes, she is, isn’t she? Thank you.”

Karen pulled a piece of paper from her purse. “This might be corny, but I wrote out a couple Bible verses for you. When I read them, I thought of you. Can I read them to you?”

“I’d love that. Please, go ahead.”

“This is from Mark, Chapter 10. I’m sure you’ve heard it before, but it’s been a good reminder to me lately. It reads, ‘And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.’”
(Mark 10:13-15)

Mary opened her eyes. She had closed them when Karen started reading. She had been picturing Jesus with the little children.

“Karen, have you ever thought about Jesus holding you like a little child? With total tenderness and acceptance, and you’re just looking back at Him, knowing that you can trust Him, that you can just lie there in His arms and He’ll take care of you, love you and hold you and protect you?”

“It’s a beautiful picture, isn’t it?” Karen said. “I wish we could all see ourselves that way. But there’s so much pain, and shame, in the world. So much that keeps us from coming to Him as innocent children.”

“I know,” Mary said. “I was reading John the other day. It says that Satan has blinded us and hardened our hearts . . . Here, I’ll read

it.” She flipped through the book on her lap until she got to the bookmarked page she was looking for. “He has blinded their eyes and hardened and benumbed their [callous, degenerated] hearts [He has made their minds dull], to keep them from seeing with their eyes and understanding with their hearts and minds and repenting and turning to Me to heal them.” (John 12:40)

Karen shook her head. “Oh, the things Satan does to keep us from seeing Jesus as He truly is – and how He sees us. If only we could see ourselves as Jesus sees us, as cleansed and forgiven. If only we could see ourselves the way Jesus sees this sweetheart here. Can’t you just picture her in Jesus’ arms?”

“Yes, I can,” Mary said. “He loves her so much.”

Karen sighed, as she gazed at the peaceful face. “Tell me again when she was born?”

“October 12, 1914.”



10-23-04

Hello? Hello? Is This Thing On?

“Hello? Hello? Is this thing on?” [Tap on the microphone.]

Have you ever felt like that, when you’re talking to God?

I’ve mentioned before that I was sick in bed for about two years. I admit that I thought God had abandoned me. Conversations with Him seemed to be monologues – one-way communication. I thought His silence indicated I was simply to endure. But now I know that I was asking Him questions He couldn’t answer. “What am I supposed to learn from being sick?” Well, how was He supposed to answer that – when the Truth is that He came to heal the sick? (Luke 4:18, Matt. 11:5) “Nothing” was His answer. There was nothing I was “supposed” to learn by being sick. He is not the author of sickness.

I know that I take risks when I speak the Truth, that is, when I speak about Jesus and everything He’s done. I have a believing friend who whispers when we talk about Jesus at work. But then another friend – a “non-believing” friend – asks me, out loud, to help him get healed, knowing full well Who it is that I call on for healing.

When I was a child, my mom said that I had an “active imagination.” That’s a motherly way of saying that I fabricated my own versions of the truth. She hit upon this little trick: she had me look in the mirror and repeat what I had told her – if I could. She knew that I couldn’t lie to myself. I still can’t. If I don’t tell you the whole truth, I won’t be able to look at myself.

Lately, I’ve felt like a prisoner in my own body. And I know that many of you out there feel the same way. I think about Larry, a man we met in a home here in Omaha, a man whose body is paralyzed by disease, yet his love for Jesus radiates from his face. I’m lucky. I, at least, can still walk around.

These may be the facts in our lives, but they are not the Truth. Lies, when repeated often enough, can seem like the truth. The Truth is that Jesus – who is the Truth – came to set the captives free – all of them; that He still talks to us – all of us; that He loves us – all of us. (Luke 4:18) He is “no respecter of persons.” (Acts 10:34) What He will do for one, He will do for another. If you are a captive, He wants to set you free. And all of us are captives, to some degree. Some of us have just become more aware of it than others.

As I said, I’ve felt imprisoned in my own body. I know the Truth, and yet I am not free. The doors of the prison have been swung open, yet I’m still inside. Why? How do I get out? What am I missing? I asked the Lord again. But I don’t think I expected an answer.

“Hello? Hello? Is this thing on?”

Last night, my husband, Mitch, was praying for me. Frankly, I was tired and not too enthusiastic. I was tired of being sick, and of trying to figure out why, what else I needed to learn. “We have a whole Bible full of truth,” I told Mitch. “But which part of it applies to me right now?”

I’ve learned so much the last few years, from renewing my mind with the Word. I know that God does not hurt His children. He does not make them sick to teach them something. He is not a child abuser. Those who say He “chastens” those He loves do not understand what “chasten” means. (Heb. 12:6) It means teach! He teaches those He loves. Jesus said that He would send another one to us, to teach us. And He teaches us by talking to us. “He will tell you all things . . .” (John 14:26)

Yes, I’ve learned a lot. But it seemed that the same mind that was learning was getting in the way. The Lord had shown me that Satan has “blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts . . . to keep them from turning to Me to heal them.” But what was I blind to? What was I not seeing? What was I not hearing? I knew His will, and I knew that “if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if He hears us, He is faithful to answer us.” (1 John 5:13) Why wasn’t I hearing?

Mitch prayed gently into my ear, his hand lying softly on my neck. I started to get sleepy; my mind started to drift. I thought, “I should try to be more awake. How can I receive if I don’t hear and agree?” In my grogginess, I heard this kind, almost teasing voice: “Well, you have to be almost asleep to receive.” It was as if He said, “With your active mind, the only time you hear Me is when you’re half asleep and your brain’s shut off!”

I thought of a story a friend had told me. Her sister had been healed through intercessory prayer – without ever being aware that anyone had prayed. I thought about people who had been prayed for without their knowledge, and were helped by the Lord. I thought about Adam, made to sleep so a rib could be taken from him. (Gen. 2:21) About Abraham, made to sleep so his distractions wouldn’t keep him from making covenant with God. (Gen. 15:11-12) Was there something to this “sleepy” thing? I will bless them in their sleep,” the Lord has said. (Psalm 127:2) Do our brains get in the way of what our hearts and spirits know, of what God wants to do for every one of us? Are we too “aware” of the world, of our symptoms, of our worries, of the so-called “facts”? Jesus’ disciples had trouble healing when they were distracted by the manifestations of sickness. (Matt. 17:15-20)

Several weeks ago, I had a lot of trouble sleeping, first because of pain, and then because my mind wouldn’t shut off. I tried not thinking about things, not worrying, but that was like my telling you, “Don’t think about an elephant. Don’t think about an elephant. Don’t think about an elephant.” Are you thinking about an elephant? Probably.

Has your radio ever been tuned between two stations on the dial? What do you hear? Static. Neither station comes in clearly. In the spiritual realm, it’s the same. Satan doesn’t necessarily care if we hear Him clearly – we may just get this vague sense of worry – but he’s satisfied if he can just be “static.” “As long as they can’t hear what Jesus is saying.”

I heard a still, small voice. And that’s all I heard. Heat began to flow from Mitch’s hand into my neck. I know that I’m taking a risk by telling you this, but if I told you anything else, I couldn’t look at myself in the mirror.

Where are you on the dial? Is the Word down into your heart and your spirit? When you need to receive from the Lord, can you take captive to the obedience of Christ the vain imaginations that exalt themselves against the Word of God? (2 Corin. 10:5) Are you asleep to the world and awake to Him?

Or is God asking you, “Hello? Hello? Is this thing on?”



Dangerous Territory

Last week, we had some technical difficulty. We couldn't broadcast until about halfway through the program, so only about three sentences of my message made it on the air. Now, it's not that I think my thoughts are so important that you have to hear all of them. I just think the message bears repeating, because, for one thing, it was actually confirmed by what was going on while I was talking. I was speaking about performance, while the very circumstances of the program assured that it could not be a performance. No one heard us but the small group of people gathered at a Council Bluffs nursing home. And as I told them, that was just fine. We would do the program just for them.

So, it seems to me that I need to say some of what I said last week. I've condensed and revised it, but it may still sound familiar.

I was lying in bed last Saturday morning, trying to go back to sleep. I knew it was a lost cause, because I had started thinking. Moreover, my heart was being moved. No matter what my body said – “Stay in bed” – I knew I had to get up.

I was remembering a conversation I'd had with a friend. We were discussing God's Law. We were probably agreeing more than disagreeing, but I remember getting confused. My friend said that we are still obligated to follow the Law, for God hadn't changed, and Jesus didn't come to abolish the Law. “No,” I said. “He came to fulfill it. That means we're not condemned if we can't perfectly follow it. And no one can.”

All that kept going through my heart was this: “We have a better covenant, based on better promises.” (Heb. 8:6) And Jesus is the Mediator of that covenant. But I wondered, “Where does that put us in terms of obeying the Law?”

Last Friday, I doubted that I'd get to the program the next day. I'd been fighting illness and pain, and struggling to maintain my strength – and my faith. I'd been unable to eat much, so I had very little energy, and, as I told my friend, “even less brain power.” I wasn't sure how I could write anything that made any sense, or how I could talk to anyone when I was having trouble forming sentences!

The Lord has been leading me to some things, as I battle illness. One passage in particular has been jumping out at me. Jesus said that Satan has blinded our eyes and hardened our hearts . . . to keep us from repenting and turning to Him – Jesus – to heal us. (John 12:40) Many things in my life have hurt my heart – “hardened” it, if you will. Many things have caused this deep feeling of shame to rise up inside of me anytime I approach Jesus. I know that I'm forgiven, but I still have this lingering sense of shame, like I'm not good enough to deserve what He has done for me.

My friend had said that the 10 Commandments functioned like a mirror, showing us that we fall short of the mark, that we can't do it ourselves. Absolutely true. But what happens when you are too aware of your inability to perform to His standards? I know what happens to me. I can't go to Him with an unguarded heart – an unhardened heart. I get only so far, and this wall goes up. I can't go to Him as a little child, unaware of my own sinfulness, to receive everything He has for me.

Last Saturday, as I thought about failing by not showing up to the program or failing when I got there, the Lord brought something to my remembrance. “I will put my laws into their mind, and write them on their hearts.” (Heb. 8:10, 10:16) I asked, “What does that have to do with the program?”

Then I remembered words spoken by that same dear friend. “We don't call it a show, very intentionally.” Have you ever noticed that? We call it a radio hour, we call it a program, but we don't call it a show. Why? Because it's not about performance – our performance.

I realized that I could just show up, with nothing to say. I could just go “blah-blah-blah” and it wouldn’t really matter. Not because we don’t care – but because we *do*. This program is not about “show.” It’s not about performance. It’s about heart.

We’re here today, and this ministry is “here” every day, not because we’re concerned about being made righteous by obeying a set of laws written on tablets or on paper. We’re here not because we’re concerned about obeying laws to avoid judgment. We’re not here to “perform.” We’re here because our hearts are in it.

My friend recently told me that he kept thinking there was something more he should be *doing*. But the Lord kept telling him, “Take your position, stand still, and see your deliverance.” (2 Chron. 20:17) I told him, “And your position is in Christ.” Our justification, our righteousness, is in Christ. That’s all we need. We don’t need to do anything else. We don’t need to perform. Why? Hebrews 10:14 says, “because by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”

It’s not about us. It’s about Jesus. It’s not about our faithfulness. It’s about God’s faithfulness. “Great is Thy faithfulness.” Abraham knew of God’s faithfulness, that “He who had promised was also able to perform.” (Romans 4:21) The only performance we need to worry about is God’s performance – and that’s something we don’t need to worry about.

We are made perfect in Christ. Our position is in Christ – not in our ability to perfectly perform, to perfectly obey. Jesus, the mediator of the new and better covenant, gave us a new commandment: that we should love one another. “Just as I have loved you, so you too should love one another.” (John 13:24) Where is that commandment written? On tablets? On paper? Where is that new law written, that we should love as He loved? Where does the love reside that makes us able to obey – to perform – this new law?

“This is the covenant I will make with them after those days, says the Lord. I will imprint my laws upon their minds . . . and engrave them upon their hearts.” (Hebrews 8:10)

Of all the places a law could be written – on tablets, on paper, in a book – the most dangerous place it can be written is on your heart. Why? Why dangerous? Because there’s no escaping the heart, because the heart compels, because the heart is driven by love. Because, when your body says, “Stay in bed,” your heart will say, “Get up. Go.”

And you do.



11-13-04

I’ll Never Quit, and I’ll Never Shut Up

Last night, my son Erik lamented the state of the world to me. “It seems like most people are doing things that are not necessarily moral.”

He was specifically referring to the sexual behavior of many of his peers. I looked at him and said, “Not necessarily moral? How about definitely immoral?”

He agreed. He was disgusted that most seem to “want only one thing” and were ruled by their bodies’ urges. I said, “There’s another word for that, Erik. It’s ‘carnal.’ And, yes, most people are carnal. ‘Broad is the path that leads to destruction.’”

I didn’t exclude myself from that category. My body has been screaming at me for attention. I keep reminding myself that I walk not after the dictates of the flesh, but after the dictates of the Spirit. (Rom. 8:1) The Apostle Paul didn’t exclude himself from the power of the flesh, either. “I do the things I don’t want to do,” he wrote. (Rom. 7:15) “O unhappy and pitiable and wretched man that I am!” (Rom. 7:24)

But he also knew – and encouraged others to seek – the way out. “Who will release and deliver me from [the shackles] of this body of death? O thank God! [He will!] through Jesus Christ our Lord! . . . For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed me from the law of sin and death. . . . Sending His own Son in the guise of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, [God] condemned sin in the flesh.” I like how the Amplified version puts that: God “subdued, overcame, deprived” sin of its power “over all who accept that sacrifice.” (Rom. 7: 24-25, 8:2-3)

Flesh and sin deprived of their power! That’s good news, isn’t it? Makes me want to shout. “Shout with joy to the Lord,” as my son Dain’s weekly Bible verse reads. (Psalm 95:1) Shout! Like you’re rooting for your home team: “Go, team, go!”

I’ve come to see our victories that way. A book I recently read describes a heavenly crowd watching intently when someone on earth speaks the message of Jesus’ salvation, then cheering when it is accepted. The Bible calls this crowd the “cloud of witnesses.” Perhaps they are like spectators at a sporting event, not participating but cheering on the athletes. I thought about asking an athlete about how fan support affects his performance. Does the encouragement bolster his heart, somehow giving him extra strength?

Before I asked anyone that question, my sweet friend and sister-in-law Emily called. She was in need of prayer, which I gladly supplied. Then she did what she always does when she “needs” anything. She blessed my socks off by praying for my needs. She ended her prayer by asking that I receive courage as I stood up to Satan. Courage. She *encouraged* me. She instilled courage in me with her words.

Back to my conversation with my son Erik. He said that he didn’t really like “having skin and a body.” I laughed then told him, “Considering how my body’s been treating me, I don’t really like having a body, either. But I know that once this life ends, I’ll just be watching from heaven. As long as I’m here, in this body, I can do something. I can help.” As long as I have this body, I have authority. I explained that God gave us the authority to choose, and that Jesus, as a man in the flesh, came to win back the authority man had given away to Satan. So, as long as we have bodies, weak as they are, we’re not just spectators. We’re participants.

But the odd thing is, one of the ways we can participate is by cheering on others. By encouraging them. Encouraging is a gift; did you know that? It’s called exhortation, and the Apostle Paul lists it right after teaching – and encourages us to operate in this gift! (Rom. 12:6-8) Again, I think of Emily, who sent me this verse after our conversation: “May He grant you out of the rich treasury of His glory to be strengthened and reinforced with mighty power in the inner man by the (Holy) Spirit.” (Eph. 3:16) I think of a friend at work, who checks on me, saying, “You will get well.” I think of my husband, Mitch, who says, “You have the victory.” Who then makes me say it, so the words come out of my mouth. I think of my mother, who’s struggled with illness and pain and sleeplessness, yet still finds a way to give however she can. She reminds me of the woman who gave two mites because that’s all she had; yet Jesus marveled at the size of her gift, because she gave all she had.

I think of the letter we received this week, from a man who said he finds encouragement in this program. Because he was encouraged, we in turn were encouraged. That we might be helping someone encourages us to press on. “This is why I’ll never quit,” my friend Paul said.

Never quit. I’ve declared that. “I’ll never quit, and I’ll never shut up.” I might as well have painted a big, red target on my back! I don’t care. Granted, it’s easier to say that when I’m feeling strong, but I say that especially after my body threatens to disable me. Because I’m not depending on my own faithfulness, my own abilities. I’m depending on God’s faithfulness. “Great is Thy faithfulness.” I sing that while I’m getting sick, in faith – and in defiance of the flesh.

I won’t be ruled by the flesh. It can’t be depended upon to properly rule us. It can distract us; it can thwart what our spirits want to do. And Satan knows that. Why do you think he attacks our bodies? Because as long as we have bodies – no matter what shape they’re in – we have authority that he does not. As long as you have a body, even if it’s not working like you want, you can do something. As long as you have a mouth, or a mind, or a heart, you can do something. You can pray. You can encourage. You can

cheer.

The other day, Mitch was frustrated that he couldn't seem to help me. He started, "I want to be able to . . ." I know what he was trying to say. He wanted to receive whatever it took to help me – a greater gift, a greater ability. I told him, as I tell you now: You have everything you need.

You have the name of Jesus.



12-4-04

Wow. Thank You.

Wow. I'm not sure where to begin. I'm kind of a bundle of emotions today; I have been lately. I've been going back and forth between saying, "Wow. Thank You," and "I'm afraid."

Some would say, "Don't ever admit that you're afraid. Make only positive confessions." They equate expressing fear with giving place to Satan. But if I don't have a diagnosis, how do I get the cure? The Lord has always told us not to fear. Isn't that admitting – isn't He confessing – that we do fear, that feeling afraid is a possibility? Yes, fear blocks what the Lord wants to do for us. But I can tell you that I don't give place to fear. I don't invite it in, and I fight it.

I know that fear entered into this world through sin. Adam hid himself from God because He was naked and afraid. (Gen. 3: 8-10) I know that Jesus, through death, destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death all their lifetime were subject to bondage." (Heb. 2: 14-15) I know that in receiving His Spirit, we did not receive a spirit of fear. "For the Spirit you have now received is not a spirit of slavery to put you once more in bondage to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption, in which we cry, Abba! Father!" (Romans 8:15)

No, I don't seek fear. I don't give it place. I don't coddle it. I don't think on things that would cause me to fear. The Word of God plays in my head, proclaiming all the reasons I should not fear. Yet I wake up afraid. I gradually dispel the fear by launching God's Word at it, but I'm tired of the battle.

What do I fear? Does it really matter? The world is full of "reasons" to fear. In your world, there may good "reasons" to fear – and few reasons to rejoice. This morning, I was looking for passages where God's people rejoiced before their deliverance. Most wait until they see their deliverance to rejoice in it. But I wonder, Where's the faith in that? If we can already see it, does it take faith to believe it? "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1)

In 2 Chronicles 20, King Jehoshaphat was told that a great multitude had come against him. Verse 2 says, "Jehoshaphat feared." Yes, he feared. But then what? "He set to seek the Lord." He said, "If evil comes upon us, the sword of judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house and before You . . . and cry to You in our affliction, and You will hear and save." He went on to say, "We have no might to stand against this great company that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon You."

Do I always know what to do? No. But if the Lord has shown me anything lately, it's that He is able to do what He has promised. Not I, but He. And He has more than promised. He has declared. He has declared it as finished, completed, done, *fini*, over, the end, that's all folks, the fat lady has sung! I was reading Isaiah 53 about a week ago, and realized that Isaiah spoke of Jesus' coming as if it had already happened. He used the past tense. "Surely He has borne our sicknesses." I began to see that God views His will as already done, as already completed. "Thy will be done on earth, as it is *done* in Heaven." When Isaiah talked of men's acceptance of Jesus' completed works, he switched to future tense. But Jesus' work is viewed as already completed, even before it had "technically"

happened. His will for us is fixed. "It is not my Father's will that one of these should perish." (Matt. 18:13-15) Fixed. Decided. Set. Done.

Back to our battle scene. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel, who said: "The Lord says this to you: Be not afraid or dismayed at this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's." This is His battle, not ours. We participate by believing. "Believe in the Lord your God and you shall be established." (2 Chron. 20:20) "You shall not need to fight in this battle; take your positions, stand still, and see the deliverance of the Lord [Who is] with you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Fear not nor be dismayed. Tomorrow go out against them, for the Lord is with you." (2 Chron. 20:17)

The Lord is with you. How often does He recognize our fear, only to immediately declare that He is with us? That is, "Do not fear, for I am with you." Exodus 14:13: "Moses told the people, Fear not; stand still (firm, confident, undismayed) and see the salvation of the Lord which He will work for you today." Joshua 1:9: "Be not afraid, neither be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." 1 Chronicles 28:20: "Fear not, be not dismayed, for the Lord God, my God, is with you." 2 Chronicles 32:7: "Be strong and courageous. Be not afraid or dismayed . . . for there is Another with us greater than [all those] with him." Deuteronomy. 31:8: "It is the Lord Who goes before you; He will [march] with you; He will not fail you or let you go or forsake you; fear not."

How do we lay hold of His declaration that we have no need to fear, because He is with us? Because He will fight the battle, because He will do the work, because He indeed has done it?

We don't judge by what we see now. We don't wait to rejoice until we see our deliverance. We rejoice and then we see our deliverance. Relying on God's words, "Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the Lord, worshipping Him" and praising Him. He appointed singers to sing to the Lord and praise Him as they went before the army, saying, "Give thanks to the Lord, for His mercy and loving-kindness endure forever! And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir who had come against Judah, and they were [self-] slaughtered."

Christmas is coming, you know. I can see the excitement in my son Dain's face. He anticipates the gifts before they're ever even purchased – because he knows they're coming. He might as well say, "Thank you," right now, because he knows they're assured. Maybe we should all try that, and see what happens. That, in fact, is what I've been doing. I stood in my kitchen the other day, afraid and not feeling at all victorious. But I said, "Lord, in the midst of feeling sick and bound, I thank You. Thank You for healing me. Thank you for delivering me. Thank you for speaking to me." Immediately, as soon as I thanked Him for speaking to me, He spoke to me. He said, "It's the 'how' you need to surrender."

"Wow. And Thank You." My friend Paul and I have joked about writing a worship song with those words. Sometimes that's all we can say! Do I know "how"? How He restores our spirits, heals our broken hearts, or completes His work in us? Do we ask "how"? Philippians 4:6 says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

Do we ask "how"? Or do we just say, "Wow. Thank You."



12-9-04

Christmas in Our Hearts

A woman is sitting at her computer, ready to make an online purchase. Her husband, standing beside her, begins to question her. "Won't those interest charges kill us?" Outside, in the distance, a barbaric horde storms into action. Just as they're about to break through the front door, the woman announces, "Don't worry." Then she explains she's using a different credit card, which protects her from those nasty interest rates. The horde stops dead in their tracks, obviously disappointed. The last words from the mouth of—

a random barbarian are, "What's in your wallet?"

This time of year, those commercials play a lot, as buying seems to be on everyone's mind. Other things play a lot this time of year, too, including sentimental holiday messages, nostalgic Christmas music, and, of course, ads promoting the latest and greatest in gadgets, trinkets and toys, along with children's holiday films. A few weeks ago, I saw a promo for the new movie *Polar Express*. The cast was discussing the importance of "believing." They said that "believing" was the real spirit of Christmas, implying that it doesn't matter *what* you believe, only that you do. Is the spirit of Christmas a fill-in-the-blanks belief system? Is just believing more important than *what* we believe? As I am fond of doing when my own spirit gets riled up, I told the TV, "The real spirit of Christmas is Jesus!" That's the holiday message I want my children to hear.

People say that Christmas is for children, that we should see through the eyes of a child. Jesus Himself said, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child shall not enter it at all." (Mark 10:15) I remember lying under the Christmas tree, as a child, looking up through the branches and watching the lights twinkle as Christmas music played softly on my parents' old Motorola stereo. Sometimes, Bing Crosby sang, "White Christmas." Sometimes, a choir sang, "What Child is This?" What is your favorite Christmas memory? I would hazard a guess that for some at least, your favorite memories come from your childhood. When a certain innocence surrounded you and kept you from feeling the cares of the world. When the rushing hordes of worry and stress and illness and sorrow came no farther than your front door.

As I look out on rooms full of people whose lives haven't always treated them kindly, I wonder if their hearts have survived intact from the days of childhood. The tagline for Desert Ministries is "reaching out to people whose bodies are broken but whose hearts still work." But sometimes I wonder if their hearts might also feel as broken as their bodies. Then I remember what Jesus said: "I came to heal the brokenhearted." (Luke 4:10) And I begin to see how God has been faithful above all. I begin to see people with hearts as young as they were 50 or 70 years ago. I begin to see innocence, and love, despite what life has brought to their door.

I remember visiting a dear woman, whose heart was full to overflowing. When I reached out for her hand, her eyes lit up. Her face shone. I hugged her, and she said, "I love you," as if she couldn't contain it any longer. Earlier, her husband had tearfully told me that his precious wife suffered from "memory problems." When she looked at me, she didn't know me. She wouldn't have known me if I'd met her any time before. It didn't matter to her. She took my hand as if I were her own daughter, come at last for a visit. "I love you," she said, as she hugged me. She didn't know me, she didn't recognize me, but it didn't matter. It was a matter of the heart, and not of the mind.

I didn't want to leave. I remember thinking, "I want to stay here all day." Who would willingly leave the presence of such love? Love offered freely, when I hadn't done anything to deserve it.

Deserving. Many of our elderly brothers and sisters have asked, when they attend a program like this, "Why are you doing this for *us*?" As if they had no value. Would a child look at his gifts on Christmas morning, and ask his parents, "Why did you buy all these presents for *me*?" I ask, What changes between childhood and adulthood? Between the beginning of our lives and the end? Does our value really change, or merely our perception of it? Has our experience defined the truth, rather than the other way around? Can we not change people's truth by changing their experience? The truth is that God loves all His children, and has since the beginning. And He will until the end of time. "Before Abraham was, I AM." The truth is that He will never leave us, nor forsake us.

Not long ago, I stood in my kitchen, comforting my youngest son, Dain, who'd been left alone by a close relative. I told him, "This will never happen again. Call me and I'll talk to you the whole time, or I'll come and get you. And you know that I would never, never, never leave you alone like that." I ask you out there now, when the world says, "You're alone," what does the Lord say? "I will not, I will not, I will not leave you."

When Dain was a baby, I'd get up in the middle of the night to feed him. I could hardly open my aching eyes, but I could feel a smile

coming from so deep within me that I couldn't stop it. I couldn't help smiling at Him. During the day, sometimes I'd just watch him sleep, and say to anyone within hearing, "Isn't he beautiful?" I just adored him. I still do. When he falls asleep in my bed, I look at his sweet face, and just, simply love him. Adore him. Rejoice that he simply exists. That I get to know him.

I think about a song we sing this time of year. "O Come Let Us Adore Him." Some think that praising God somehow functions for His good, that HE needs praise. When I look at Dain, and adoration fills my heart, I think, This is how we'll feel when we finally see Jesus. We'll be so overwhelmed by love that we can't help telling Him how we feel, knowing that if we do not, the very rocks will cry out in praise. We won't be able to contain ourselves. "I love you!" He'll reach out, and we'll know, without seeing Him before, that He is our Lord. That He is our everything. That we want stay there forever, never leaving the presence of such love. That we want only to look at Him and say, "Isn't He beautiful?"

Well, I have good news. That's how Jesus looks at us, too. We don't have to look back at our memories to rekindle our innocence. For He came to heal the brokenhearted. We don't have to wait to see Him, to adore Him. He is here now. He is in the faces and in the hearts of those He loves – His brothers and sisters, His Father's children – and we are all His children, young and old. "Forbid not the little children to come to Me, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Luke 18:16) If you will reach out, you will recognize a spirit you may have never officially met – the real Spirit of Christmas. You won't see wheelchairs, or walkers, or sickness, or broken hearts. You will see children excited and expectant, trusting and optimistic. And you will see Jesus – if you will look with His heart.

So, in the face of those rushing hordes, instead of asking, "What's in your wallet?" I ask, "What's in your heart?"



12-11-04

He Came to Heal the Brokenhearted

Before the program began, I gave two pieces of paper to a volunteer from our audience. Elaine, do you still have those pieces? Can you hold them up, so we can see? For our listening audience, Elaine is holding up two red triangles. Thank you. Just hold onto them for now, while I tell you a story, and a rhyme.

First, the rhyme. "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again." We all know that rhyme, don't we? It has an odd origin – Humpty Dumpty was actually a canon used by the Royalists – the king's men – that was destroyed when enemies struck the wall the canon was sitting on. The wall crumbled and Humpty Dumpty the canon fell off, and the king's men couldn't get it back together, and back on the wall again.

Interesting, eh? But I kind of prefer the derivations that have come about since then. We've come to think of Humpty Dumpty as an egg, falling off the wall and shattering. Here I have a bag of eggshells. Can you imagine trying to piece this shell back together?

Hold that thought, while I tell you a story. You know it well. Joseph went with his wife, Mary, to the town of David, called Bethlehem. I continue, from Luke: "And she gave birth to her Son, her Firstborn; and she wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room or place for them in the inn. And in that vicinity there were shepherds living in the field, watching over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord flashed and shone all about them, and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people. For to you is born this day in the town of David a Savior, Who is Christ (the Messiah) the Lord! And this will be a sign for you: you will find a Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Then suddenly there appeared with the angel an army of the troops of heaven, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men of goodwill." (Luke 2:4-14)

I love that story, don't you? The best thing is that it's not a nursery rhyme or a story. It's true. The King of the universe comes to save us, and the angels rejoice. Angels doing the Father's will rejoice for us. Doesn't that mean that the Father is also rejoicing? Can we imagine that?

Last night, I was overwhelmed by sickness again. Not so much the sickness, but the heartache of still being sick. My husband, Mitch began to stroke my hair, lovingly, and I realized something. I couldn't imagine God Himself doing that, to me, for me. Mitch began to relate how Moses wanted to see the face of God. This is how he paraphrased it: "God said, 'Moses, you don't know what you're asking. You'd burn up! So let me go behind this rock, and you pass by.'" Mitch continued: "Lori, Moses got a suntan from just being where God had been! His face was still radiating when he came down from the mountain. No man can see God and live."

Hmm. I thought about that. No man can see God and live. No man, in this fragile human shell we call a body, could withstand encountering the complete power that is God. I mean, when mere angels show up, we fall down, trembling! So, how does God choose to show up? He shows up in a manger, in a dirty barn. He lives His life "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not." (Isaiah 53:3) He is born in filth and ends up washing our feet of the filth we've picked up from walking in the world.

Despised and rejected of men. Could He have lived a more human life? Who among us has not been rejected? And rejection is the source of so much of our brokenheartedness. This is what the Lord has been speaking to me about: broken hearts. Jesus said that He came to heal the brokenhearted. (Isaiah 61:1, Luke 4:18) And He said that the evil one comes only to steal, kill and destroy. He sets men's hearts to reject others, and thereby steal the wholeness of their hearts – they steal pieces of it. We walk around with only parts of our hearts working.

In our brokenness, we might think we have nothing to offer. But think about what Peter said, when he approached a lame man. "Silver and gold, have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." (Acts 3:6) He might have been lacking in one regard – he had no money – but he gave what he did have.

No man can see God and live. Jesus also said that no one has seen the Father. Yet He said, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father." (John 14:9) He lived his life, giving what He had, and ended it by giving everything He had. And He told us to do as He did, to love one another, even as He loved us. (John 15:12) Even as He loved us? Can we do that? Can we "be" Jesus to one another?

Look at this bag again. This represents our hearts, broken. How do we put them back together again? This is how it starts . . . Elaine, I have something for you. Will you give me one of your triangles? When we put them together, my piece with your triangle, your triangle with my piece, what do we have?

Two whole hearts.



2-12-05

Heart Afire

Monday is Valentine's Day, a day we all start talking about love. This morning, I looked for passages about God's love. There are many, of course, but I wondered if we've heard so much about God's love that we don't comprehend it anymore.

We've heard many times that God so loved the world, He sent His only begotten Son. So many times that it has become almost cliché. We say, almost perfunctorily, "Thank You, Lord," without really knowing what a gift His love is, or what it does.

One day a couple weeks ago, I awoke with a terrible sense of loss, and powerlessness. I began to think about all the loss and pain experienced by God's beloved people. I couldn't dispel a disturbing image. I'd gone to visit a friend at a local nursing home and instead found his roommate, lying in bed, lifeless except for his eyes, which were wide open and filled with desperation. I wanted to speak to him, but what could I say? Here was a man who might have had a large family, maybe a business, with fine clothes, maybe a church member, a joke-teller, a star athlete. Now he couldn't move. He owned only what would fit in half a 20' x 20' room. His only clothing was a white hospital gown. His only friends, the nurses. And he was looking at me. At me. You know what I said? What words of wisdom I summoned up to fortify him? "Hi."

The longer I thought about that man, and the others like him I've met, the worse I felt. I ended up sobbing. Somehow, I knew that the Lord also felt that pain, that He does *feel*. He knows loss. He grieves for the lost. He knows the pain of loss so well that He sent His Son to save us, to keep us from being lost. Jesus spoke His Father's heart: "It is not my Father's will that one of these should perish." (Matt. 18:13-15)

I felt the pain, and felt helpless to stop it. "Lord, what can I do?" I'm not Jesus, who walked perfectly in the Spirit, who was perfectly equipped, who was in constant contact with the Spirit. Then something else occurred to me: Jesus' ministry was physically confined – limited – to the area He could travel by foot. Was that frustrating? He went to His hometown and was unable to give them what the Father wanted them to have. He had all the power and authority, and yet could do little, because they would not receive Him. Surely, that grieved Him. Surely, it grieves Him today. Yes, He knows loss. He feels it. "I hurt when you hurt," He once told me. "I hurt when you hurt."

When your children hurt, do you not hurt? When someone is kind to them, doesn't it do your heart good? My husband, Mitch, is good to my son Dain because he loves Dain, but also because he loves me. He knows it makes my heart sing to see Dain loved.

Valentine's Day: a day of love. Jesus said the greatest commandments are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind; and to love our neighbor as ourselves. "On these two, hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matt 22:37-40) Could it be that these two are so closely related that in loving God's children, we are loving Him?

"Okay, Lord," I said, "You gave me this heart. You gave me this compassion. You can't do that and then leave me this way! You have to give me the power to *change* things. I won't settle for anything less!" I asked Him to forgive me if I was being disrespectful. I figured that He knew what I was thinking, so I might as well say it! "Lord, You said that You came to heal the brokenhearted, and to set the captives free. If you did that, then You had better give us a way to apply it!"

So, Valentine's Day is coming. After I looked up passages on love, I looked for information about St. Valentine. Apparently, he was a third-century priest who defied the Roman emperor by performing marriages for the young men whom the emperor wanted for military service. During his imprisonment, he began the Valentine's tradition by signing "from your Valentine" on a letter to the woman with whom he'd fallen in love. Now, this is what I find interesting. He fell in love with this woman while he was in prison. Because she had visited him in prison.

Does that sound familiar? "When I was in prison, you visited Me." "Lord, when were you in prison and we visited you?" His disciples asked. He answered, "Whatsoever you do to the least of these, you do to Me." (Matt. 25:39-41)

Think about that: Our whole tradition of Valentine's Day rests on a love that was fashioned when someone visited another in prison.

"Yes, Lord," I said, "I will visit. But I also want the power. I want to do as you did, 'to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison and of the eyes to those who are bound.' (Isaiah 61:1) I don't want to just visit those in prison; I want to open the prison itself."

The answer I received was not one I expected, but one which He has been continually speaking to me. I'll give you some hints, from Scripture. How was Jesus able to heal? "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." (Isaiah 61:1) And what or who is the Spirit? "The Lord is the Spirit." (2 Corin. 3:17) What is the Spirit, the Lord, made of? "God is love." (1 John 4:8) So the Spirit is love. And therein lies His "power." "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." (2 Corin. 3:17)

How did the Lord answer me, when I asked for the power, along with the heart, to set people free?

"If you have the heart, you have the power."



2-19-05

The Voice of Truth

Have you ever noticed that the more "real" something is, the harder it is to talk about?

That is, it's easier – and safer – to talk theoretically. We easily say, "God so loved the world." But things can get a little too "real" when we try to apply the theoretical principle of God's love, which is expressed in reality this way: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Want to see "real"? Walk into a nursing home.

I've been wanting to tell you a real story, about something that really happened to me. But I'm finding that difficult. "They'll think I'm nuts," I've been telling the Lord. (So what's new, eh?) The Lord reminded me of the story again this morning, when I asked Him what to say today. I was thinking that I could talk about the things I've been learning this week. No. He said, "Tell them I love them."

He told me that last July, too, at which time I responded, "But they've heard it a hundred times." He said, "Tell them again."

When I heard that again this morning, I recalled reading what Joyce Meyer had written about her first sermon. She had prepared some teaching, but the Lord instructed her to tell her listeners that He loved them. Her response was similar to mine: "Everybody knows you love them." He said, "No. Very few of My people know that I love them." (*Beauty for Asbes*, p. 103)

Does it surprise you that the Lord speaks to Joyce Meyer – or to me, for that matter? Sometimes I wonder if people believe me when I say, "The Lord told me . . ." Are they thinking, "God spoke to you? I've never heard God speak."

Well, first of all, God *does* speak to us. In Deuteronomy 28, the Lord says that blessings will overtake us if we listen and obey: "If you will listen diligently to the voice of the Lord your God . . . if you heed the voice of the Lord your God . . ." Now, if we are to heed His voice, He must be speaking to us!

And, when God speaks, it's probably not in the way you'd expect. He doesn't use this "thundering" voice. That would be the voice of God the Father, which seems to come directly from heaven – or the clouds, as if it were thunder. Only three times does He directly speak in the New Testament; when He does, He speaks to or about Jesus. When Jesus was baptized, the Father spoke from heaven: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:17) On the Mount of Transfiguration, the Father spoke from the clouds: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him." (Matt. 17:5) When Jesus said, "Glorify Your name," the Father said, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." You know what most of the crowd heard, when God the Father spoke those words to Jesus? Thunder. Not words, but thunder. (John 12:28-29)

So, if you're listening for God's voice, don't listen for thunderous words. Listen for that "still, small voice." Listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit. How do we know it is the Holy Spirit who speaks to us? Jesus tells us that very thing. "I still have many things to say to you, but you are not able to bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of Truth (the Truth-giving Spirit) comes, He will guide you

into all the Truth.” Listen to what Jesus said the Spirit would do: “He will not speak His own message, but He will tell whatever He hears [from the Father], and He will announce and declare to you the things that are to come.” (John 16:12-13) The Holy Spirit will “speak,” “tell,” “announce,” “declare.” It is His voice that speaks; it is His voice you want to listen for.

“Well,” you might say, “God still doesn’t talk to *me*.” Do you think the Holy Spirit speaks to only a few? In Acts, we read, “For the promise of the Holy Spirit is to and for you and your children, and to and for all that are far away, to and for as many as the Lord our God invites and bids to come to Himself.” (Acts 2:39) Jesus said the Spirit would testify of Him, the Christ. And how many does He testify to, how many does He invite? “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.” (John 12:32) *All* men.

For further reassurance of the Holy Spirit’s guidance, the apostle Paul declares that anyone who confesses that Jesus is Lord does so through the Holy Spirit. “No one can say, Jesus is Lord, except by and under the power and influence of the Holy Spirit.” (1 Corin. 12:3)

And yet another promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of His voice and His guidance: “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?” (Luke 11:13)

Now, it might seem that I’m way off my topic, about God loving us. It might seem that I didn’t heed the Spirit’s voice, when He told me to say, “Tell them I love them.” But do you see, in that last verse especially, that His Spirit is promised to His children because He loves them? Do you see that God does not leave us “comfortless” – without the Comforter – because He loves us? Do you see that He speaks to you, because He loves you?

Do you believe me when I say, “God said, ‘Tell them I love them’”?

If you can believe these things, then perhaps you will believe another, “real” story I will tell you about God’s very real love . . . next week . . .



2-26-05

One Word

As I said last week, I’ve wanted to tell you a real story, about God’s real love. The Lord reminded me of the story again last week, after instructing me, “Tell them that I love them.”

Before I told you the story, however, I wanted you to know – to be assured of – a few things. First, that I had indeed heard from the Lord, and that you, too, hear from Him. Even though my receiver hasn’t always been tuned in, that doesn’t mean He wasn’t sending messages. Second, that because of His great love, He is always speaking to us – all of us – through the Holy Spirit. Third, that what He has done for me, He wants to do for you.

A few nights ago, I realized again that we truly do live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. (Matt. 4:4) I felt desperate for a word from Him. Any word. Even just one word from God would help me hang on. I’d been under attack – from the moment I declared my intention to speak about God’s love. Jesus said that Satan comes to steal the Word, because it is life-giving (Luke 8:12); I believe he was trying to steal God’s word for you before I could say it. Twelve hours after the program, at 3:00 in the morning, I tried to get out of bed, but found I couldn’t walk without excruciating pain. I recovered within a few days, only to get hit by intestinal symptoms I hadn’t experienced in months, along with fatigue and depression. I knew the purpose of these attacks: to silence me.

It almost worked.

I cried out to the Lord. “The sick shouldn’t have to heal themselves.” Must we be our own physicians when we are at our weakest? So much seemed to depend on *my* faith. I needed an answer. I needed to hear Him, as clearly as I’d heard Him last May, when He spoke to me about broken hearts – including mine. Struggling with illness, I had asked, “Lord, when will it be over?” Heaviness gripped my heart. Suddenly, I heard the word “heartache,” and just as suddenly I knew and spoke this: “The Lord is going to replace what’s in my heart with peace.” The next morning, He confirmed what I’d heard, with familiar words: “I came to heal the brokenhearted.” (Isaiah 61:1) That meant me.

I believed Him. I just couldn’t see what a broken heart had to do with illness, or exactly how He’d heal my heart. Then I thought, “For that matter, we can’t see how He renews our spirit, either.” We can’t see it happening; we often don’t even feel it. But we can trust that He honors His Word, regardless of what we see or feel. (“God is not a man, that he should lie.” Numbers 23:19)

In December, a word spoken by the Lord led me to watch an old movie about Peter Marshall, a Scottish man called into American ministry. His wife, Catherine, contracted tuberculosis. One day, she listened to her husband on the radio, as he talked about the woman with the issue of blood. “Lord,” Catherine said, “I have done and said everything I know to do and say. I don’t even have the strength that woman had to crawl through the crowd. So, if you want this body, broken as it is, take it.”

When Peter came home, his healed wife was standing at the foot of the steps. “Catherine,” he said with joy, “the Lord was waiting for you to give Him every last bit of yourself!”

Was this what God wanted me to see? I could relate to Catherine’s words, but I couldn’t relate to her breakthrough. I’d said everything she’d said. I’d given Him my broken body. And still nothing.

Several weeks later, my husband, Mitch, reminded me of that scene, and then said, “Lori, it’s your heart that God wants.”

I sighed. I thought I had given Him my heart. But I chose to obey. Not feeling the least bit spiritual, I said, “Lord, I give you my heart. Every last bit of it.” I closed my eyes, expecting nothing. Well, God honors our words in the face of our feelings. It is His faithfulness on which we can rely. Moments later, I sensed a kind of light flowing into my body, and I heard the word “compassion.” I told Mitch, “I feel like God’s compassion is streaming into the left side of my body.” At that moment, I realized, as never before, that it is God’s compassion that heals. It is His love. It is not a progression of steps: He loved us, was moved to compassion, and then healed us. It is all one in the same action. It is His very love that heals. He saves us, heals us, delivers us not just because of love, but also through love.

I began to see how I had guarded my heart all my life. Responding to hurt, I had built a whole system of self-preservation, unaware that it actually kept *Him* from preserving me. Many times, the Lord has led to me this passage: “Satan has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts . . . to keep them from turning to Me to heal them.” (John 12:40)

Two months ago, to this very day, God honored my meager words with His great faithfulness. Normally, in those 60 days, I would have gotten violently ill at least 20 times. Do I dare say it? With the exception of last week, I have been ill only twice since that December day – and then only mildly. Am I all the way there? Perhaps not. But I believe God’s Word more than any other report. “He who has begun a good work in you will bring it to completion.” (Phillip. 1:6) Do I expect a battle? Sure. The last seven days have demonstrated that, and the fight was almost effective in silencing me. But, as it is written in Scripture, “The Lord is on my side; whom shall I fear?” (Psalm 118:6) And, as it is written in my journal, in all caps, “Demons, can you read? I’m not going to shut up.”

In the midst of my attack, I needed a word – just one, like the one word “compassion.” I’d heard as I felt God’s love streaming into me. This time I had protested, “The sick shouldn’t have to heal themselves.” He let me rail on. When I was finally quiet, this is what I

heard: “You’re right.” He went on to show me how His church is failing, how so few believe or teach or practice healing, how many leave the sick to be sick.

Precious words from God, even angry as they were – because when He speaks, it is out of love. It is out of compassion. “Tell them that I love them.” What expresses that better than “Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out demons.” (Matt. 10:8)



3-19-05

Chickens Little

Every time I sat down to write for today’s program, the day before Palm Sunday, one thought kept occurring to me. It replayed itself in my head again and again, no matter what else I read about Palm Sunday. It’s something Jesus said, long before the procession of palms and hosannas.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Luke 13:34)

“As a hen gathers her brood under her wings.” Jesus’ words echo the words of Psalm 91: “He shall cover you with his feathers, and under His wings you shall trust: His truth shall be your shield and buckler.” (v. 4) It was a promise of protection that belonged to God’s children, those who love Him and know Him: “Because he has set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he has known My name.” (v. 14)

I have never owned chickens, but I am told that when danger threatens, a hen does not run around after her chicks to protect them. She spreads out her wings and clucks to them, so they come running and hide themselves under her feathers. I know it’s probably odd to think of our Lord clucking like a hen, but Jesus said it, so I’m just repeating it! “How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings . . .”

What strikes me most is what He said next: “But you were not willing!” He had spread His wings, and called, but they did not run to Him for safety, for salvation. Then He said, “Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see Me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (Luke 13:35)

In fact, Jerusalem did not see Him again until the day of those celebratory cries. As He headed toward the city five days before the Passover feast, five days before His crucifixion, His disciples began to rejoice and praise God. “Hosanna; Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, who comes in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.” (Mark 11:9-10) It is understandable that they rejoiced. They were finally able to declare what they knew: that Jesus was King.

The Pharisees did not appreciate the declaration. “Master, rebuke your disciples.” (Luke 19: 39) Perhaps even less they appreciated what “hosanna” meant: “Save us, we beg you.” The disciples knew who their king *and* savior was.

As we look back on the celebration, it is hard to see it as such, as joyful. We know what followed it, just as Jesus knew what lay ahead. Such suffering, we cannot even fathom. But was it His own suffering that preoccupied Him? As He looked over the city, He wept, but not for Himself. “He wept over it, saying, ‘If you had known, even you, at least in this your day, the things which belong unto your peace!’” (Luke 19:41-42)

He was thinking about those who did *not* know Him as King and Savior. Just as He had lamented, “O Jerusalem . . . how often I wanted to gather your children together . . . but you were not willing,” He was grieved that the Lord’s children did not know what belonged to them. They did not know, in this “their” day, the things that belonged to “their” peace.

It seems significant, if not ironic, that the fronds the people waved that day were of palm trees. The date palm is extremely fruitful, with one tree producing 300 pounds of fruit when fully mature. Did they know they were holding symbols of abundance, of inner power? Did they know what they could do – what belonged to them – when they tapped into the root of that power?

I am aware that I am speaking to people who may not feel “tapped” into power, but strapped into beds and chairs – and often trapped by life, their minds or their bodies. For as long as I’ve been speaking on the air, I’ve been trying to let you know what you have, what belongs to you, and to tell you that it is not God who is withholding it from you. Today, I will paraphrase something I heard last weekend: “Anything that stands between you and God’s will is not of God.”

As I look out at you today, and as I think about the people we serve every day, I think of Jesus, weeping over us, as we do not claim and fight for what He has given us. We celebrate, without knowing the entirety of what we celebrate. Like the disciples who rejoiced one week and hid the next.

I say, if you’re going to hide, do it the way of Psalm 91: dwell in the secret place of the Most High, so you may abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, My God, in Him I will trust. Surely He shall deliver me from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover me with His feathers, and under His wings I shall take refuge; His truth shall be my shield and buckler. I shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. I shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent I shall trample underfoot.”

And, on this Palm Sunday weekend, remember what Psalm 92 says about you: “The righteous shall flourish like a *palm* tree. He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall *still bear fruit in old age*; they shall be fresh and flourishing, to declare that the Lord is upright: He is my Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.”

Hosanna in the highest!



4-2-05

Merry-Heart Medicine

I am not a comedian. I don’t tell jokes well. I sometimes say funny things, but usually it’s unintentional. People look at me funny, but that’s not usually my intention, either. Some people think I have funny ideas. But that’s not really the same as being funny, is it?

I am happy, but I tend to think seriously about most things. So, talking about the topic of humor is about as close as I can get to “being” funny.

My husband, Mitch, on the other hand, is very funny. When we were first getting to know each other, we e-mailed a lot. I had no other way to tell him how funny he was than to write, “That was funny.” Now, in person, saying, “that was funny” really isn’t the same as laughing, is it? If you’re saying, “That was funny,” you’re not laughing, are you? You’re talking.

My friend Paul here is also funny. I love his light-hearted sense of humor. He never pokes fun at anyone, only himself. And of course, it wouldn’t be right if I didn’t laugh at him, too. I mean, *with* him.

God, too, has a sense of humor. He must – just look at us! What odd-looking creatures we are. And He made us in His image? What, then, must God look like?

I know He has a sense of humor because of the way that He deals with me. He should be exasperated by now. But even when He tells me something that might otherwise sound condemning, He seems to be smiling, maybe with His hands on His hips, or rolling His eyes. For example, one evening Mitch was praying for me. I started to get sleepy and my mind started to drift. I thought, “I should try to be more awake. How can I receive if I don’t hear and agree?” In my grogginess, I heard this kind, almost teasing voice: “Well, Lori, *you* have to be almost asleep to receive. It seems the only time you hear Me is when you’re half asleep and you’re brain’s shut off!”

Do you remember George Burns playing God in the movies? Sometimes I think we’d be better off seeing Him that way, as a cigar-toting comedian, rather than as the lightning-bolt-wielding God most imagine. The one ready to condemn us. But let us take our image of God from His Word. What does the Word say? It says that Jesus is the perfect reflection, the exact representation, of the Father. “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” Jesus said He wasn’t doing His works, but the works of the Father; He did only the things He saw His Father doing. And what did Jesus do? He healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, raised the dead, and cast out demons. That, by the way, is also what He told us to do. In doing so, we are also doing His Father’s works, and reflecting His Father’s image.

That’s serious work, no doubt. Healing the sick is nothing to be taken lightly. It is, however, quite satisfying – “fun,” if you will – to take back ground from the devil! In any case, the Word does have something to say about what we can expect when we come to know the Father intimately, and what we can expect when we enter the kingdom of heaven. For one thing, we can expect to laugh. Yes, laugh. “Blessed are you that weep now: for you shall laugh.” (Luke 6:20)

We are to expect joy in His presence, in the freedom He has won for us. In one of my favorite passages, from Isaiah 61, He declares that He has come “to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”

No, I am not funny. I do not have the gift of humor. But I am joyful. That is a gift of the Spirit. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, *joy*, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” (Galatians 5:22-23) This joy not only comes from God but is also a part of God, and resides in us because it resides in Jesus, who, with the Spirit, resides in us. It’s not something we “conjure” up or make up like a good joke, but results from walking in His love. “If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love. These things have I spoken unto you, that My *joy* might remain in you, and that your *joy* might be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you.” (John 15: 10-12) In other words, our joy is full when we love one another.

A joyful heart is a healthy heart. It is good for the rest of the body. Proverbs 17 says, “A merry heart does good like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.” Even modern science has seen that this is true. Laughing, the outward expression of a joyful heart, lowers blood pressure, reduces stress hormones, relaxes the muscles, strengthens the immune system, reduces pain by releasing endorphins, exercises the heart, and improves respiration.

So, with that in mind, I’ll close with a small dose of laughter medicine. You’ve heard of the Serenity Prayer? This one is called the “Senility Prayer.”

“God grant me the senility to forget the people I never liked anyway, the good fortune to run into the ones I do, and the eyesight to tell the difference.”

B-rump-pump.



Reality Versus TV

This is the point in the program where Paul would turn to me and say, “Lori, would you take a few minutes to share your heart with us?”

I’ve done that many, many times – share my heart, that is. Sometimes, I’ve shared more than is comfortable! But if this program is about anything, it’s about bringing comfort to someone else without regard to our explicit comfort. The first time I did this program, nearly two years ago now, I was extremely uncomfortable. If Paul were here, he’d tell you that up until two minutes before airtime, I was pacing and praying on the front lawn of the home we were broadcasting from. Yikes! The very idea of me with a microphone!

Now, it seems I’m more comfortable with a microphone than many other things. It’s funny how what we become accustomed to can become our friends. In this case, that’s a good thing. Not so for other things. Not if they become false friends, or crutches. Not if they have no life in them.

In just about every nursing home I visit, the TV is on. In the waiting area, in the activity center or its equivalent, in every room, even in the rooms of people who cannot hear or see it. Why? Is it to fill an otherwise uncomfortably quiet room? To give the appearance of activity? To give the impression that someone is there with them?

We have sat in front of the television for so long in this country, that we don’t know the difference between illusion and reality. Even “reality” has become just an illusion, given the spate of reality shows. How about turning off the TV and experiencing reality? I have a feeling that’s too “scary” for most people to do. Why? They are comfortable in their chairs. They are comfortable not moving. They are comfortable with what’s been fed them as a substitute for real nutrition.

And yet, they are not. In the absence of real “food,” they make do with what they’re served. It is no surprise that many of our older citizens cling to the TV as their only friends. In many cases, that is the truth. Of course, TV can be a good source of information and mental stimulation. But it is not a good substitute for human contact.

I used to turn on the radio in my car when I got lost, almost thinking that it would give me directions! Of course, that’s absurd, but is it any more absurd to think that turning on the TV will lead us to some revelation we really need?

I was glued to the TV for many days during Terri Schiavo’s ordeal. When it was over, I still found myself wanting to turn it on to learn something more. But what? What was I looking for? Some assurance that the world had done something to make sure this would never happen again? Was the TV really going to give me that? Or would I just get lost in some other news story without any real resolution? There is plenty of violence in this world to lament.

Seeing and seeing and seeing, and hearing and hearing and hearing, without doing anything, can be our un-doing. “Be not hearers of the word only, but doers. Be not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” (James 1:22) Don’t hear only, but do, to avoid becoming one who is “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (2 Tim. 3:7)

You can watch and watch and watch, and never “see” anything. You can make friends with the people on TV and never see any real visitors. Don’t accept that as your substitute. You will not find what you need on the TV. All of us have certain human needs; companionship and relationship are among the most crucial. If you are searching for something to fill that emptiness, TV will not do it. Nothing but the Lord, working in your heart and through His people, will fill you. “Be continually filled with the Holy Spirit,” Paul said. (Eph. 5:18) There is no one like Him.

Read the Word. If you cannot read it, listen to it on tape, or ask someone to read it to you. If you have no one to read it to you, call us, and we'll find a volunteer to read to you. I will personally read it to you! My son Dain will read it to you!

Pray. If you cannot speak, know that He hears you anyway. "I will answer them before they call." (Isaiah 65:24) If you want someone to pray for you, again I say, contact us. Tell the staff to call us. Tell the staff to put you on our prayer list.

If you're listening today and are not an older adult, you can help. You can be doers and not hearers only. It's not tough. You go to your local nursing home and say, "I'm here to read the Word or pray for anyone who wants it." But that means you have to shut off your TV.

And get out of your comfort zone.



5-7-05

Can a Mother Forget?

Tomorrow is Mother's Day. What comes to mind when you think of mothers? Do you think of your own mother, either your biological or adoptive mother? Do you think of special people who have been like mothers to you? Do you remember the mothers who have no others to remember them?

The Mother's Day tradition goes back much farther than most of us are aware. Of course, God has often told us to honor our mothers: "Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you." And Proverbs 23 tells us, "Do not despise your mother when she is old."

Interestingly, however, the holiday itself arose from pagan festivals. Early Christians later adopted the festival and instead honored Mary, the mother of Jesus. The British expanded the holiday to include all mothers, and called it Mothering Sunday. About 150 years ago, Anna Jarvis organized a "Mother's Work Day" to raise awareness of poor health conditions in the Appalachians. Her daughter, also named Anna, was instrumental in establishing the first Mother's Day in 1914 as a national holiday to honor mothers.

So, there is good precedent for honoring our mothers. But there is something else I'd like you to think about concerning mothers. If you are a mother yourself, you know the joy of having children. Even if you are 60 or 80 or 100, you undoubtedly still remember what your children mean to you, how precious they are. Children, even when difficult, have always been considered a blessing. Deuteronomy 7: 13, for example, tells us God will bless us by giving us children: "And He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your land." Psalm 113 says He grants the barren woman a home, "like a joyful mother of children."

I look at Dain, and I know it's true. I am very simply glad that he is alive, and connected to me. I can't help but think that this is the way the Lord sees us. I imagine God saying, when He was thinking about creating man, "I just want someone to love." Not someone to be loved by, but someone to love.

I was thinking about motherhood last night, so I asked Dain, "What's the best thing about me as your mother?" Without hesitation, he answered, "You love me."

A couple weeks ago, I was sitting in a grand Catholic cathedral, for the mass that was part of a spiritual retreat I was on. I was feeling sick at the time, again, as I looked up at the figure of Jesus on the cross. I thought of His words as I asked, "Father, why have you forsaken me?" Of course, I knew intellectually that He had not, but everything in me *felt* that way. I heard in my spirit, "I have not forsaken you. I brought you here."

Later, when I went back to my room, I felt no better. I desperately wanted to go home. Instead, I opened my Bible to the first Scripture I had been assigned hours earlier, long before the mass or my despairing question. From Isaiah 49: “But Zion said, ‘The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.’” My own words echoed in my head. I read on. There, in black and white, was the answer to the question the Lord knew I would ask. Verses 15 and 16: “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!”

I immediately thought of Dain, and an understanding I’d never really known washed over me. I wrote in my journal, through tears, “He thinks of me as tenderly as a mother thinks of her child. I know how that feels. And God loves me that way? He loves me like I love Dain?” Could it be that the God who is adulated in grand cathedrals would love us as tenderly as a mother loves her children? Could it be that the God who is called “El Shaddai,” the Almighty, would never forget us, any more than I could forget Dain or my two other sons, even well on their way to adulthood?

“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast?” Who asks that question? “El Shaddai” Himself – literally, the “Many-Breasted One.” The nourisher, the supplier of all our needs. “In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation, I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances, to say to the captives, ‘Come out,’ and to those in darkness, ‘Be free!’ . . . They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water. I will turn all my mountains into roads, and my highways will be raised up. Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains! For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones. . . . Then you will know that I am the Lord; those who hope in me will not be disappointed.”

This Mother’s Day, I want to speak to women of all ages. Even if you are 100, I want you to think of yourself not as a mother, but as a child, loved as greatly and completely and tenderly as you love your own children. As you face disappointment or abandonment, I want to ask you once more, for El Shaddai, the Many-Breasted One: “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast?” And I want to remind you of His promise: “Though she may forget, I will not forget you!”



5-15-05

Who Do You Say That He Is?

When you look at me, what do you see? Do you wonder what I do? I’ve had a lot of people ask me about what I do with Desert Ministries, and I find that a hard question to answer. Saying, “I’m the co-host of the Desert Ministries Radio Hour” doesn’t really fully answer the question. First, I’d have to talk about what Desert Ministries itself is about, what the Radio Hour is designed to do, and what I do for the program. But even that response isn’t complete. I could also say that I visit nursing homes, specifically to pray for people. You might start getting a better picture of my one little piece of this ministry, and call me a prayer minister, a radio co-host, a writer, a volunteer.

I’m also a mother, a wife, a daughter, a graphic designer, a ministry student, a business owner, a neighbor, a baker, an interior decorator, a painter, a washerwoman, a maid, a teacher . . . well, you get the idea. What would you say you are, if I asked you? Would you tell me what you did when you were very active or employed? A farmer or banker or lawyer or shop owner or construction worker? Homemaker, teacher, nurse, mother? How do you define yourself? Especially now?

I think about Jesus asking His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Then He asked, “But who do *you* say that I am?” You know, we can’t rely on what others say Jesus is. *We* need to know who He is. Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus told him that that he was blessed, because he had not learned this from men, but from the

Father. (Matt. 16:14-17) That's a great position to be in, isn't it? Hearing for yourself who Jesus is, and not relying on what anyone else says. Why is that? Because if you call Him your savior or your comforter or your peace, that's what He is to you. You have found that out personally; He has been your comforter or your peace.

I have a poster in my office that lists 53 names of Jesus. I've put them all on pieces of paper and handed them around to you. There are so many, they outnumbered the people here. Some of my favorites are: Lamb of God, Living Water, Bread of Life, Light of the World, Image of the Invisible God, The Word, Author & Finisher of Our Faith, Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Prince of Peace, Only Begotten Son. When I tell you my favorites, I'm giving you some indication of the ways He has become important, or real, in my life. What we call Him shows us and tells others what He means to us, who He is to us.

For example, if I said that my friend Fred is my printer, you'd know that Fred is my friend and that he also does all of my printing. In the same way, if I said that my Lord Jesus is my Healer, you'd know that Jesus is my Lord and that I rely on Him as my sole healer.

Jesus asked Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" Surely Jesus would ask that of us, as well. "Who do you say that I am?" It is a worthwhile question to ask, as your answer will tell you what He means to you. And seeing that He has other names may lead you to see what else He can be to you.

But there is another question I'd like to ask you. "Who does Jesus say you are?" No longer a servant but a son of God? A joint heir with Him, seated next to Him? A child of the most high God? The head and not the tail? More than a conqueror? A prophet? Teacher? Apostle? I'd like to create a list as long as the names of Jesus. But then again, you should remember that if Jesus lives in you, then all of who He is also lives in you. As Paul said, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." (Gal. 2:20) Paul also asked, "Do you not know that the same spirit who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you?" (Romans 8:11, 1 Corin. 3:16) If we only could grasp who lives inside us, we might be more courageous to say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philip. 4:13)

So, again, I ask who Jesus is to you, for what we call Jesus depends on what we have learned about Him, and what we have allowed Him to do and be in our lives. In the story of Jesus' washing His disciples' feet, Peter refused until Jesus told him, "Unless you let Me do this for you, you can have no part in Me." (John 13:8)

Now, of course, Jesus was demonstrating servanthood and was foreshadowing what He would do on the cross – wash us entirely, cleanse us from all sin. But what did He mean when He said we could have no *part* in Him unless we allowed Him to do this for us? Do what?

Think about the act of foot washing, as the one receiving it. Or perhaps you have been put in the position where you must rely on help from others. It's very humbling, isn't it? In Jesus' day, washing the feet of others was such a disdainful act that not even a servant could be forced to do it. And yet Jesus tells us this is what we must allow Him to do for us – or, rather, to be for us. As the servant of all, even the Lion of the Tribe of Judah is also the Lamb of God – the one, all-sufficient, willing sacrifice for all our most humbling needs. Unless we allow ourselves to humbly accept His best gifts, we separate ourselves from Him. This is how I heard it from Him, not too long ago: "Unless you let me love you, you can have no part in me."

So, I say, very simply, let the Great I AM be to you everything He is. Let Him love you.



5-21-05

Due Season

Lately, I've been thinking about the phases of life. My son Erik will graduate from high school tomorrow; one phase of his life will end, and another will begin. The Bible calls these phases "seasons" and says that their timing is planned and purposeful: "To every

thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” (Eccles. 3:1)

Sometimes, the seasons change whether we’re ready for them or not. Erik’s ready for this season to be over; he’s excited about getting on to “real” life. He’s made plans for his future, already expectantly imagining life in the Air Force after four years of engineering college. Because he’s excited about the change, he’s ready.

I guess I’m ready, too. As I was putting together a photo collage of his life, I could have gotten very nostalgic. But I realized that through every stage of his life, his strong, outspoken, slightly goofy personality has shone – or leaked – through. I am confident that Erik has been and will always be “Erik,” whatever the season of his life.

My oldest son, Ryan, is in the midst of a long season at college. He’s not sure where he’s going, but feels pressured to accommodate the expectations of the world. I’ve been doing my best to affirm that he is already “good enough,” and that the Lord has given him a purpose, even if he hasn’t discovered it yet. “I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jer. 29:11)

Sometimes we’re not ready for a change of season, such as when we age. When older age brings sickness, that change is even harder to accept – and I don’t think we should accept that. Declining health is not a “natural” part of aging. When the Lord speaks of a long life, He refers to it as a blessing. “With long life will I satisfy him.” (Psalm 91:16) Science has discovered that our neurons are designed to last 120 years – the exact number of years the Lord set for our lifespan. “His days shall be yet 120 years.” (Gen. 6:3) 120 years of living in illness would hardly be a blessing, would it? Well, in fact, Moses lived to 120, and when he died, “his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated.” (Deut. 34:7) He didn’t die in sickness; his time, or his “season” had arrived. “There is a time to be born, and a time to die,” Ecclesiastes says. Or, as Eliphaz the prophet told Job, “You shall come to the grave at a full age, as a sheaf of grain ripens in its season.” (Job 5:26)

There are times when we are very ready for the seasons to change. We have sown and are eager to reap. We’re anxious for our “due season” to arrive. Maybe we’re tired, or frustrated, and wondering if there’s anything growing in the soil we’ve planted. As we attempt to stand fast, we remember what Paul said: “Let us not grow weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap.” (Gal. 6:9)

The tough part is the condition of our reaping: we must not “faint,” or lose heart. It’s tough because it’s hard to endure when things look bleak. We look at biblical and modern examples of promises being fulfilled, and wonder why we seem to be the exception. We believe the Lord but can’t seem to attain what we know He wants for us. Will our time come?

That’s when the Lord reminds me of this: as the rain does not return to heaven but waters the earth and makes it bring forth and bud, His Word does not return to Him void, but accomplishes its purpose. (Isaiah 55:10-12) His Word keeps working in us until it does everything He intended it to do – if we don’t let go of it or let the enemy steal it. Jesus warned against this, in the parable of the sower, where the “wicked one” either lies to us and speaks against the Word of God, or brings so much worldly pressure on us that we give up.

If there’s one thing I want to say today, it’s this: never, never, never give up on God and His promises. As Paul said, “in due season, we shall reap, if we do not lose heart.” Or, as the Lord told me last week, when things were dark: “Rejoice. Rejoice irrationally. Radically.” Mitch and I went to the grocery store and danced down the aisles!

Keep looking for and expecting His promises. Keep expecting His Word to accomplish its purposes. A few days ago, I held up my Bible and asked the Lord, “Which promise in here is specifically for me?” He said, “Psalm 38.” Honestly, I had no idea what Psalm 38 said. I read it. It described me to a tee. “I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken. I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart.” And, like David, I had been thinking, “I am ready to halt.” I asked the Lord, “Where’s the promise in that?”

I read on. “You will hear, O Lord my God.” Sorry to say, that didn’t seem like much of a promise.

But I kept reading. “My enemies are lively, and they are strong: and they that hate me wrongfully are multiplied. They also that render evil for good are my adversaries; because I follow the thing that is good.” When I read that, I began to understand a couple things. First, I believe the Lord was telling me it was okay to feel crabby about my situation and to expect Him to fulfill His promises. Second, I believe He was telling me that He was not the one delaying my “due season.” Like anyone who follows “the thing that is good” – that is, Christ – I have enemies. And I’m not talking about people.

The very next day, I received news that will literally change my entire life, particularly my health. It is the due season I have been waiting for. I can finally confirm what David eventually realized, after he had gone mourning all the day long: “The Lord upholds all that fall, and raises up all those that are bowed down. The eyes of all wait upon you; and you give them their meat in due season.” (Psalm 145:14-15) Or, as Eliphaz told Job, “Those who mourn are lifted to safety. He frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot carry out their plans.” (Job 5:11-12) Every strategic move made against you has a planned countermove from God. “No weapon formed against you shall prosper.” (Isaiah 54:17)

The news I spoke of is too complicated to go into now. But maybe it’s okay if you don’t have the details, because you also have details in your life that are complicated. But I will say this: as I saw my season come “due” this week, I also saw that the promise I read in Psalm 38 may be the only one any of us needs. “You will hear, O Lord my God.”

In other words, God *knows* the details of your life. And that, my friend, should encourage you not to lose heart, whatever season you’re waiting through or waiting for. “They who sow in tears shall reap in joy.” (Psalm 126:5)



5-28-05

Let the Weak Pitch a Tent

I sat down at my computer to write. Nothing came to mind. I was tired. Those of you who regularly listen to this broadcast know that I struggle with illness. Sometimes it just depletes me. I don’t feel like I have anything to give or anything to say. I try to be encouraging, but sometimes I just come to the end of myself. “Lord, I have nothing. This has to be you.”

I heard the words of the Lord come to me. “My strength is made perfect in weakness,” He told the Apostle Paul. (2 Corin. 12:9) Paul then decided to glory in weakness. Many have misinterpreted that as Paul’s saying he’d gladly hold onto illness, because it helps him glorify God. Let me assure you that illness does not glorify God. As a work of Satan, it serves him. No, what Paul was saying is that when we come to the end of ourselves, when we see we cannot battle without Him, then He’s able to do what He wants to do. In other words, we don’t surrender to illness; we surrender to His strength to deliver us. We hand over our weakness and He hands us strength. “Beauty for ashes, strength for fear, gladness for mourning, peace for despair.” (Isaiah 61:3) What a wonderful trade!

When we’re perpetually sick, something happens to us inside. I’m sure you know this. We come to believe that we’re all alone. Alone, because we’re the only ones who feel what we feel, we’re the only ones in our bodies. Alone, because no one really understands. We feel like we’re battling alone. Am I right?

I’ve felt that way often. The other day, I told the Lord that I felt alone. He said, “You are not alone. You are not alone. You are not alone. How many times do I have to say that?” He added that question, I’m sure, not to chide me but to remind me. He would tell me that as often as I needed to hear it. God doesn’t have to repeat Himself again and again for something to be true. He only has to say something once for it to be true. He will, however, tell you as many times as you need to hear it.

Throughout the Bible, God says over and over again, “Fear not. Fear not. Fear not.” Isn’t that what we’re doing when we feel alone?

Fearing? So what does He say after He tells us not to fear? “You are not alone.” “Fear not, for I am with you.” (Gen 26:24) “Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord your God, it is He that goes with you; He will not fail you, nor forsake you.” (Deut. 31:6)

We don't need to fear, because He is with us. We are not alone. That's the first thing God said after He created man: “It is not good that the man should be alone.” (Gen. 2:18) Satan's been working toward our being alone from the very beginning. It was part of the original lie. He told Eve that she would not die, but would be like God. What does that mean? What is God like? Among many other things, He is self-created. Even Satan knew this. “I shall be exalted above the self-created one.” (Isaiah 14) To be self-created is to be completely independent, to have no needs that we cannot satisfy ourselves, to be able to exist apart from Him. That is the lie Satan wants us to believe, that we *are* in fact alone and *can* exist without Him. What happens when we live apart from Him? It's the same thing that happens when you uproot a flower. It may look alive for a while, but it is already dead. It died when it was pulled from its source.

That's where sickness got its start. Our sin separated us from God, the pure one, the Holy One. Life itself. Life Himself. When we became separate, apart, from Him, we separated ourselves from life. Jesus came to restore that life-giving connection.

From the beginning, God has promised to be with us. “And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the Lord their God.” When Jesus came, whose very name Immanuel is “God with us,” He went about “doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil, for God was with Him.” (Acts 10:38) Before leaving this world, He said, “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. (Matt. 28:20)

The apostle Paul knew that feeling alone and fearing were tied together. He reminded us that we need not fear, because we have become grafted into God's family. “For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but you have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” (Romans 8:15) We don't have to fear, because our Father – our “Daddy” – is God, is the Almighty. When your father is the Almighty, what is there to fear?

Illness can make us weak. That was never the Lord's intention. Illness came into this world with sin. He would no more want you sick than He would want you to sin. Both, however, if we turn them over to the Lord, will confirm to us that we cannot be separate from God. We have no strength apart from Him. As Jesus said, “You can do nothing without me.” (John 15:5) There is no life apart from Life itself.

Many confuse the Life-Giver with the life-stealer. Jesus said the thief comes not but to kill, steal and destroy. (John 10:10) Those are not God's jobs; God's job is all about life. When we attempt to follow Him into fullness of life – abundance of life – and we encounter resistance, one thing becomes clear: we can't do this by ourselves. In our weakness, our inability to do it alone, that we turn to the only one who can do it: the Lord. “When I am weak [in human strength], then am I [truly] strong (able, powerful in divine strength).” (2 Corin. 12:10) Paul decided to glory not in illness but in his persecution, because it meant the Lord would be ever with him, fighting for him. “Therefore, I will all the more gladly glory in my weaknesses and infirmities, that the strength and power of Christ (the Messiah) may rest (yes, may pitch a tent over and dwell) upon me!” (2 Corin. 12:9)

When you are weak, remember that the Lord is with you. Don't glory in the weakness, but glory in the fact that the Lord delivers you from the weakness when you turn it over to him. “Let the weak say, I am strong.” (Joel 3:10) Or, as I said when I began this long story, which “somehow” became filled with the Word, “Lord, I have nothing. This has to be you.”



6-11-05

I Can't

I have a client, a fine-art photographer, for whom I write photo descriptions – mini-stories, really. I might tell some background information about the area or the subject, but usually I’m trying to lend meaning to the photo. They have told me the “stories” really help the images sell.

A couple days ago, I came to Story No. 158, called “Provence in Bloom,” and came to a standstill. “What is there to say about this? It’s a field of purple flowers.” I must have tried a dozen different approaches. Nothing worked! I said, “Lord, I can’t do this! You have to do this!”

I took breaks. I called my son Ryan. I was still stuck. I thought that this was the one I wouldn’t be able to write. Finally, finally, I got the first sentence. I don’t know how. It just came to me. Then I typed as fast as I could, because the rest just came pouring out. My client e-mailed me the next day. “Your words are so healing. You have a true gift . . . I love the ‘Provence in Bloom’ description. However, to pick one out as my favorite would be to ask, ‘Who is your favorite child?’”

I was surprised. Healing? Could the Lord have done that, using my words about purple flowers? And my client’s favorite, among the 158 I’d written? The one I was hopeless about? I thought, “Just goes to show that you can never tell how something is going to turn out, based on how it starts.”

I worked for hours yesterday on what I was going to say today. After all that, I woke up this morning and started over. I’d written about worry. I knew it was important, because anxiety and depression are closely related and often occur together – 85 percent of the time. Makes sense, doesn’t it? What happens in both cases? You feel like you’re out of control. Hopeless. Helpless. Among the elderly, depression is only slightly more common than among the general population, but it is twice as rampant in nursing homes than elsewhere. And to make matters worse, the elderly are more likely to take matters into their own hands.

I’d written that Jesus told us not to worry about any aspect of our lives – or “take no thought” for it. (Matt. 6:25-34) That’s not to say we are to be passive – no, quite the opposite. We are to “take no thought,” meaning we are not to admit into our minds thoughts of fearful things. Jesus never denied the existence of evil. “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” (Matt. 6:34) Evil is to be taken “care” of – by enforcing what He accomplished. But we are not to “worry” about *how* we are going to accomplish anything on our own.

I realized today that I had written very little yesterday about how not to worry – probably because I’m not very good at not worrying. I could wake up every morning with new worries. Fortunately, His mercies are also renewed each morning! It is true that “sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,” but it is also true that His grace is sufficient for us. (2 Corin. 12:9) He has, He is, everything we could ever need. He Himself is sufficient for us.

What happens when we worry? What are we telling ourselves? “But I can’t . . . I won’t be able to . . . what will I do if . . . I can see it all now . . .” Who’s talking here? “I” am talking, and it’s not the “I” of “The Great I AM.” When we worry, we’re often thinking we need to do things that seem impossible. And that’s what the Enemy will tell you, too. “You can’t do this.” You know what I say to that? “You’re right. I can’t. But God can.” Jesus said, “With men, this is impossible. But with God, all things are possible.” (Matt. 19:26)

I love that word: “all.” It covers everything, doesn’t it? What is left to worry about? Oh, someone will try to get you to worry, by telling you lies. Whichever lie you’re hearing, you can know that a truth stands in direct opposition to it. If you hear, “You’ll never make ends meet,” you can know – and say – “It is written, ‘The Lord my God provides for all my needs.’” (Phil. 4:19) If you hear, “You’ll

never accomplish anything worthwhile,” you can declare, “It is written, ‘I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future.’” (Jer. 29:11) If you hear, “You’ll never get well,” you can defiantly state, “It is written, ‘I am the Lord, who heals you.’” (Exod. 15:26)

The Apostle Peter told us to give our cares to God. “Casting all your care upon him; for He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7) Casting isn’t a wimpy thing. When you cast something down, it shatters from the force. When I cast my care upon God, I imagine flinging it at Him! I don’t want it! And casting our care isn’t a passive action. We are to actively “take no thought”; we are not to cooperate with the thoughts that contradict God’s messages or promises to us. They are enemies, which “exalt themselves against the knowledge of God.” We are to take these thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corin. 10:5)

Strong words about one of the things we seem to easily do every day – without thinking. And that’s one our Enemy’s strategies: to get us into a destructive habit. We’re often not even aware that we’re doing it, which is what a habit is – an unconscious pattern acquired through repetition.

It is understandable that we’d get into this habit. When you frequently experience distress, whether it begins in your mind or your body, it can start to define your life, and your thought life. As I said, Jesus did not deny the existence of evil; He told us not to fear it. And He did not come just so we could “put up with” the evil that threatens us. He drove it out wherever He found it, including the evil of pain and disease. He bore them in His body as our substitute. Some say suffering builds character, but the Lord has made it clear that He doesn’t want you to worry. Why would He want you to suffer?

Suffering and worrying are closely related. The word “worry,” in fact, originally meant “to strangle,” or “to grasp by the throat with the teeth and lacerate,” like wolves kill sheep by grasping them and shaking them. You know who you are, don’t you? You are one of Jesus’ precious sheep. And are you supposed to lie down and let yourself be worried – or strangled? What did Peter say, right after he told us to cast our care unto God? He said, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Peter 5:8)

I woke up this morning, worried about having time to rewrite this story. I know who was behind that. But in the end, even after getting sick in the middle of writing, I finished at 1:10, having written a completely new story. As I said, “Just goes to show you, you can never tell how something’s going to turn out, based on how it starts.” Good thing that God is the Alpha and the Omega – the beginning and the end.

Now, if I can just remember that the next time I sit down to write . . .



6-18-05

Our Dada Which Art in Heaven

Tomorrow is Father’s Day, a day we celebrate and honor our earthly fathers. Such a day is good, and is in keeping with the sixth commandment, but it usually takes more than a single day to honor our fathers. That’s one of the reasons Desert Ministries exists in the first place! To honor our parents, whether they are our biological parents or not. The Lord makes it clear that fathers are very important – those without them are to be specially cared for. He speaks often of caring for the “fatherless” and the widows.

But, as you might guess, I’d like to talk about a different father – Our Father. You know that the Lord’s prayer begins with “Our Father, which art in heaven.” I once thought of that phrase as a way of identifying *which* father we were speaking about – our heavenly father as opposed to our earthly father. Well, Jesus tells us the *only* father we have is our heavenly father. “Call no man your father upon the earth: for *one* is your Father, which is in heaven.” (Matt. 23:9) So, when He says, “Your father, which is in heaven,” He’s reminding us which father is our “real” father – the one in heaven.

What is this “real” father like? Can we use even the best human father as an example? Jesus sometimes did that, such as when He said we would not give our children a stone when they asked for bread. “If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to them that ask?” (Matt. 7:11) He figured we’d understand even that, but it’s really only the tip of the iceberg. We have to redefine our concept of Father – and I’m not sure I can do that in such a short time!

That’s what Jesus did, though. He was thought radical and heretical when He called Almighty God, whose name was unutterable, “Father.” And not only that, He called Him “Abba,” which is like “Daddy.” Actually, according to Malcolm Smith, “Abba” is really like “Dada.” He says that the first words from Hebrew babies’ mouths are usually words like “abba-abba-abba.” So, Jesus sounded like he was using baby talk to describe his relationship with the Most High God!

We’re familiar with one reference to Jesus’ use of “Abba.” Before His death, He said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me.” (Mark 14:36) The God for whom all things are possible is Jesus’ “Dada”! We’ve seen this one reference to Abba, but every time we see the word “Father” in the King James Version, it really says “Abba.” We just haven’t translated it that way. Can you imagine that? Hearing “Dada” in the proper, formal King James Version? Go through your Bible and substitute “Dada” every time “Father” appears. It might shock you at first, just as Jesus shocked those who heard Him.

So, if Jesus wants us to think of God the Father as our real father, as our “Dada,” what is this “Dada” like? Let’s look at one story, the familiar story of the Prodigal son. (Luke 15) A son who “wasted his substance with riotous living” returns home – much to the delight of this father and the chagrin of his brother. Jesus tells this story after using other examples to explain that when one is lost, all efforts are concentrated on finding the one, even if the rest – or the 99 – have to be left. And when one is found, there is great rejoicing. “Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.” (Luke 15:6)

Usually, we see this story from the son’s perspective, or maybe the brother’s. But do we understand the father’s perspective? Consider that the word “prodigal” has two meanings. It means rashly or wastefully extravagant, as the son was. But it also means “giving or given in abundance; lavish or profuse.” That’s what our Prodigal Father – our “Dada” is like – giving in abundance, lavish, profuse! Bringing forth the best robe, the best rings, the best shoes; killing the fatted calf – all in joy. Blessing us all of out of proportion of what we deserve, but giving just because He loves us. We often think we have to deserve a gift before we get it. Why, then, did the Father send His son when we were sinners? Surely not because we deserved a Savior. No, we *needed* one. What is a gift? It is pure grace, based not on the merit of the receiver but on the love of the giver. Thank goodness!

We can see more of the Father, our Abba, by looking at Jesus. For Jesus said, “I and my Father are one.” (John 10:30) He said and did as He saw the Father doing. “The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” And He was an exact representation of the Father. When Philip asked Jesus to show them the Father, Jesus said, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?” He said that anyone who had seen Him had seen the Father – our Father.

Again, Jesus wants us to understand the nature of our relationship with Almighty God. After rising from the tomb, Jesus instructed Mary to tell the disciples, “I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.” (John 20:17) He wants us to know that His father is our Father, and that “The Father himself loveth you.” (John 15:27) Again, that’s the King James Version. Try it this way: “Dada himself loves you.”

It doesn’t get much clearer than that, does it? But don’t we try to confuse it all, sometimes even thinking that our Abba could hurt us, instead of bless us like the prodigal, or lavishly giving, Prodigal Daddy he is? The daddy with a whole universe of fatted calves at His disposal?

And what does He tell us to do, armed with that knowledge? “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.” (John 15: 9) He tells us to continue in His love, but He also tells us to go into the world as He came into the world, to show the Father’s love, “As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.” (John 20:21)

What gives us the power to do this? “And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” (John 15:22) What gives us the courage? Paul tells us: “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” (Rom. 8:15)

The father of the universe has adopted us, and tells us to call Him “Abba.” “Dada.” It is that same Dada who tells us to honor all of our earthly fathers – our “adopted” fathers. In doing so, we can truly say, “Happy Father’s Day, Abba.”



6-25-05

All Things New

This story doesn’t really have a conclusion. I like stories that have a beginning, a middle and an end. I like to get to the point where I can look back in hindsight and say, “That all turned out just fine.” But I feel like I’m in the middle – just as you might. Even though you’re toward the latter part of your life, maybe it still feels like you’re in the middle of something you just want to get through. All I can do is tell you what I’ve been hearing from the Lord . . .

It’s 8:25 Saturday morning. I’m sitting at my computer, wondering what I’m going to write. I only know what the Lord has been speaking to me. All night long, I dreamed of variations on a theme. Everything I looked at, I changed, or was changed. For example, I saw a bike pointing one direction, so I turned it the other way. Relationships were changed, for the better. I can’t remember all the images I saw, but I remember that when I woke up, I heard these words: “all things new.”

I thought of one of my favorite verses – which was made favorite several months ago because the Lord kept putting it into my path over and over again within just a couple days. It was Dain’s memory verse of the week back in the fall. We’d reviewed it on the way to school. Then, as I drove to work, I turned on the radio, and there it was again, in the lyrics of the first song I heard. Later that night, I opened a devotional; there it was again. The next day, when I told a friend of mine about all the “coincidences,” she went back to her desk and found that her daily scripture calendar was on a page with that same verse.

It’s 2 Corinthians 5:17. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, all things are made new.” There’s another verse that goes right along with that verse, from Revelation: “And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.” (Rev. 21:5) So that’s what I’m doing: writing, for I know these words are true and faithful.

A few days ago, I came to the point where I felt like the world was an unfriendly place, that it was harmful to me, and to others. Yesterday, a friend whose husband battles illness expressed the same sentiments, afraid to keep hoping, in fear of being disappointed once again. I told the Lord, “This is not the beautiful world You created. How could You give us, with our limited minds, authority over this world? Yet You have, and we have ruined it.”

Some say that the world doesn’t matter, that our bodies don’t matter. But my spirit resides in my body, so how could my body be unimportant? In support of the view that it isn’t, people quote God’s words to Paul: “My grace is sufficient for you.” (2 Corin. 12:9) Absolutely – but in this context: When He loves you, you can endure what the world throws at you. Mitch told me the other day, “I love you, but that’s all I can do.” He was frustrated that he couldn’t seem to help me. I said, “Being greatly loved makes everything so much easier to endure.” That’s what God’s grace will do for you. Uphold you when you are attacked. Give you joy even when your body feels terrible.

Of course the Father is aware of everything we must survive in this world. He knows the number of hairs on our heads! And of course He cares about our bodies. Jesus, who is the express image of the invisible God, never turned anyone away whose body was sick. He told us not to walk by someone with bodily needs, just saying, “Be warmed and fed.” (James 2:16) He told us not to *worry* about our bodies, whether we’ll be able to feed or dress them – not because they’re unimportant concerns, but because they’re taken care of! Why? Because “your Father in heaven *knows* you have need of these things.” (Matt. 6:30-32)

We spend so much time trying to figure out exactly what to say and how to say it, to get God to “move.” I tell you, He wants so much to give you what He’s provided for you that He’ll jump at every opportunity. I think of the woman with the issue of blood, crawling through the crowd. (Luke 8) As soon as she touched the hem of Jesus’ garment, bam! She was healed. That’s all it took. I imagine the Father saying, “Good enough! You got it!”

God wants to make this so easy for us. We need things to be easy, don’t we? Sometimes we don’t know what to pray. Sometimes we don’t have the strength or the wisdom to find the right words. That’s when we call out to God like Peter called out to Jesus when he started to sink after walking on the water. “Help me, Lord!” (Matt. 14:30-32)

We think of that as some kind of failure, don’t we? When Jesus said Peter had little faith, we think that’s a condemnation, which we then apply to ourselves. “I don’t have enough faith to get God to move.” Well, Jesus reached out to Peter, didn’t He? He didn’t let him drown, did He? Did Peter have to say the exactly right words? No, what Jesus was saying was something like this: “Listen, Peter, you really could have kept going. You can’t look at the circumstances and think they have any bearing on what I want to do for you, or what you can do with My authority.”

That’s where His grace comes in, and is sufficient. “You have all the resources of heaven at your disposal.” And all it takes is faith no greater than a mustard seed – which really means that you need faith *like* a mustard seed. This tiny seed “knows” that all it needs to grow into something big lies within it – that the processes to make it grow are built into it. You need to know that what you need lies within you – not of yourself, but of Him. When we are told to have faith, it is not our own, but the faith *of* the Son of God, who lives within us.

Yes, God meant this to be easy. Jesus said, “All things are possible to those who believe.” (Mark 9:23) *All* things. But if it’s really this easy, why does it seem to elude us? Don’t we end up asking God why He’s doing nothing? I came close to asking God that question last night. I’d been to the gym and ended up feeling so horrible that I nearly called an ambulance. Instead I said, “Jesus is my healer. Jesus is my healer.” I managed to get out the door and into my car. As I rounded a corner near home, I said, “Lord, thank you for getting me this far.” And I meant that figuratively as well as literally.

When I got home, I called out: “Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit!” I imagined them standing there, waiting to see what I wanted. Since I had their attention, I said, “We’re here today to finalize Lori’s healing. She’s endured a long time, and she wants this to be over. She’s put all of her faith in You. So finish the job. Thank you.” I laughed, imagining this divine “board meeting.”

I went to bed, not thinking about much. But then I dreamed. All night. Of one thing, in many forms. Of everything changed, turned around, completely different – every circumstance, every example the Lord could give me. And then I heard these words when I woke up: “Behold, I make all things new.”

As I said when I started, this story doesn’t really have a conclusion. But, now I have written them down, for they are true and faithful, just as He is.



God is a Proper Noun

Are you ready for a grammar lesson? Think back to your grade school English class. What is a noun? It's a person, place or thing, right?

Now, here's another question: What kind of noun is God: a person, place or thing?

Well, actually, He's three Persons, isn't He? "God in three Persons, blessed Trinity." That phrase has been going around in my head for a couple days now.

The concept of "person" seems a pretty straightforward thing, doesn't it? You look at your friend sitting next to you, and you see him or her as a person. Do you see God that way? When you can't "see" Him? What makes up a person? I looked in the Catholic Encyclopedia for a biblical definition of "person." Seven long paragraphs, with a lot of Latin, boiled down to this: a person is "an individual substance of a rational nature," where that substance is "complete, subsisting *per se*, existing apart from others."

That's kind of mind-bending, so let's think of our common, simple understanding of person. My son Dain gives me a good example. The other day, he looked at me and said, "I love you." Then he looked at Mitch and said, "I love you." Then he looked up, to invisible air, and said, "I love you." He asked, "Do you know who I was talking to?" "Yes," I said. "God." An entity distinct enough from us that we talk to it – to Him.

That's an odd concept, isn't it? Talking to someone we can't see? And expecting Him to hear and answer? Don't think you have faith? The very fact that you talk to the Invisible Man should tell you that you have faith. Faith in what you can't see but believe is there. We'd all be sent to the looney bin if we walked around talking to the thin air – if deep down, we all didn't know that the person we're talking to is really there.

I've always known that God is there. However, as I've told people, "I don't always know what He's doing with me." Maybe that's your experience. You believe, but you don't really know what you believe. God seems unpredictable to you. Our human theologies have either said, "We know all about God," or "We can't know anything about what God will do." In trying to avoid seeming like Pharisees, with everything figured out, we often revert to the other stance: "We can't say what God will do."

Last week, Paul read a story about the woman who crawled through a crowd to get to Jesus for healing. The Word tells us she was thinking in her heart, "If I could only get to Him, I will be healed." If she had been thinking, "I can't say what God will do," would she have been healed? What if she'd been thinking, as others may have been thinking, "I've heard this guy Jesus can heal, but I'm not sure if He'd heal *me*." Or, "I'll ask Him to heal me if it's God's will." Or, put an "if" in there, followed by anything. "I'll ask Him to heal me *if* I've satisfied the requirements, *if* it's my time, *if* I've suffered enough, *if* God doesn't have some purpose in my sickness."

No, she thought, "*If* I could only get to Him, I will be healed." Her only "*if*" involved being able to *get* to Him. She never even asked; she sneaked up on Him. And Jesus never had the opportunity to say either "yes" or "no." He realized she wanted to be healed when she sucked the power right out of Him! (Jesus said He felt virtue flow from Him.) (See Matt. 9, Mark 5, Luke 8)

Now, of all the people in that throng, this woman was the only one who was healed. Why? Did others stay sick because God is so unpredictable that we can't tell what He'll do? Or was she the only one who had faith that God's actions *are* predictable – based on Who He *is*. If she thought He was unpredictable, that there might be some "caveat" – some divine "if" – to her healing, would she have thought that *all* she needed to do was get to Him?

She knew enough about God to know what He would do in that situation. How do we come to that kind of knowledge? By hearing these kinds of stories. By observing Jesus' actions and behavior. By listening to what Jesus taught. By studying His parables. We come to see that God is not unpredictable. We see that Jesus used ordinary, predictable things to describe the Father and His ways. Take a seed, for example. We plant it, and it grows, in a predictable way. "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed." (Matt. 13:31) He didn't say, "It is *sometimes* like a mustard seed." No, it's consistent and predictable.

Ideas can change, but the person of God does not. His character does not. His nature does not. Our understanding can change. Our ideas about God can change. But He doesn't. "Jesus, the same yesterday, today and forever." (Heb. 13:8)

The other day, as I was trying to analyze some godly principle, and getting frustrated, the Lord said to me, "I am not a concept." That took me off guard, and I've been pondering it ever since. Had I been treating God like an idea? Yes, we can come to the knowledge of God by learning about Him, but we need more. We need to know *Him*. Learning about Him is not the same as knowing Him. You can know that God is love without ever feeling it. You can know that Jesus brings peace without ever basking in that peace. You can know that He heals without ever being healed. But God is not the idea of love or the idea of peace or the idea of healing. He is not a concept. He is a person – three persons, as a matter of fact.

You can listen to all this, and still never know God as a person. You can understand what I'm saying without ever experiencing it. You can take my word for it, or you can talk to God yourself. You can imagine Him your size, sitting next to you, listening to you, answering you. You can talk to the "air" and say, "I love you." You can discover that God is a noun – but He is not a thing, even if that "thing" has a fixed, predictable and "rational nature." He is a Person.



7-23-05

Do You Have a Hero?

Do you have a hero? If you do, what makes him or her a hero?

In literature and drama, the hero is the main character – not necessarily a perfect person, someone who does everything correctly. In fact, he's usually a fallible human being who somehow pulls off the seemingly impossible, or at least the very difficult, usually under challenging circumstances. Novel writers know that putting their hero in jeopardy builds conflict and tension, which ultimately leads to resolution.

Not so different from real life, is it? We all want resolution, don't we? When facing difficulty, don't we want to get to the point where we can say, "Whew! Made it." Where we're looking back on it and are no longer in it. No longer in a boat that's tossing to and fro and up and down.

The image of a boat makes me think of two of my heroes, one perfect and the other not. One sleeps during a storm and the other panics. One says and does everything right; the other sticks his foot in his mouth. One acts deliberately; the other leaps before he looks. One is true from beginning to end; the other stumbles along the way. One does the Father's will at all times; the other has good intentions.

I'm sure you've guessed that I'm talking about Jesus. But who is the other character in this story, the imperfect one? Actually, he could be any one of us, fallible creatures that we are, which is why he's one of my heroes. I can personally identify with him.

He's Peter. Peter is a man who tells Jesus not to do anything that would lead to His death. He had good intentions: he didn't want to lose Jesus. So I'm sure he was surprised when Jesus said, "Get behind Me, Satan." Peter is a man who assured Jesus he would never

betray Him. He loved Jesus; he couldn't imagine disowning Him. Yet he was horrified to realize that he'd done exactly that when push came to shove. Peter is a man so awed by the appearance of Moses and Elijah with Jesus on the mount that he cried out, "Let's build three tabernacles, one for each of you." He might as well have said, "Let's stay up here forever, okay? This is so cool!" (That's probably what I would have said.) Peter is a man who was so excited to see Jesus after His death that he took off his clothes and jumped into the water naked to swim to shore!

Peter is also a man who jumped out of a boat, in the middle of a storm, to get to Jesus. He was halfway there before he realized that he was walking on the water – and that it wasn't something a human being should be able to do. He began to sink, and cried out to Jesus, who later asked him, "Wherefore didst thou doubt, ye of little faith?"

And that's where we get stuck, isn't it? We identify with Peter, and scold ourselves, saying, like I have, "Oh me of little faith."

But I want you to consider something. When Peter stepped out of that boat, did any of the other disciples come with him? Where were they? They were back in the boat, probably thinking Peter was out of his mind. Yes, Peter started to sink, but at least he made it out of the boat! You can't sink into the water if you're not at least trying to walk on top of it. Being "of little faith" is better than being "of none."

And when Peter denied Jesus, where were the other disciples? They had scattered when the soldiers took Jesus away. At least Peter followed Jesus. The others weren't there to even have the opportunity to deny knowing Jesus. Being there is better than staying at home.

When Peter pleaded with Jesus to spare Himself, the Son of Man could do no other than to make His Father's will known: He had to die. Peter had spoken in ignorance, but also out of love. His heart's intentions were clear. Saying the wrong thing is better than saying nothing at all.

Which brings me to a quote I read this week, one that seems particularly fitting to this ministry: "A friend who holds your hand and says the wrong thing is made of dearer stuff than the one who stays away."

Yes, it was Peter who said and did rash and impulsive things. But it was also Peter who was chosen by Jesus to be the rock of His church, who was told to feed Jesus' sheep, who healed people by passing through their midst, who was led by an angel through prison gates, who testified of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, who proclaimed his love for Jesus as many times as he denied Him.

It was Peter who jumped out of the boat to walk on top of the waves instead of waiting for the boat to stop tossing to and fro. It was Peter who brought resolution to our story when Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?"

It was Peter, our fallible hero, who answered his hero, "You are the Christ."



7-30-05

The Philosophy of the Age

I don't think it's an overstatement to say that we, as human beings, face serious, complex issues. Difficult end-of life decisions, for instance, present themselves every day to those living, working or loving someone in a nursing home. What standard do we use to make those decisions?

A lot of people have tried to come up with reasoned, "rational" systems by which to govern our actions. They have been called

“philosophers.” Today, many are called “bio-ethicists.” By any other name, they are still using man-made models to determine ethical answers.

One such man visited Omaha recently. I don’t know a lot about what he believes, but from what I’ve read, he knows even less about the Christian faith that he condemns. He holds that Christians don’t value creation, but only themselves, and that they believe “God does not care how we treat” the natural world. He considers himself superior, as a “humanist” and an animal rights activist, one who contends that animals have the same rights as humans. He writes, “We are animals, with no God-given or inherent right to subdue other animals” – which is to say that humans have no more rights than animals. Think of that for a moment. If you could justify doing something to a rat, you could do it to a human being.

I wonder if philosophers think through the logical consequences of their theories. Take utilitarianism, for example. It’s also called the “Greatest Happiness Principle.” It holds that “actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure.”

Say you’re making decisions for someone else and you want to use the utilitarian model of ethics. Because only the “sum total of happiness” is considered, you’d better know how everyone will be affected, including society at large. Maybe society doesn’t find pleasure in the financial cost of care. Then what? Or, what if you want to make a personal sacrifice and care for the person yourself? Utilitarianism holds that “a sacrifice which does not increase the sum total of happiness is considered as wasted.” (John Stuart Mill, 1863)

I wonder if Jesus’ sacrifice seems like nonsense, like waste, to modern philosophers? What do they make of this: “Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends”? (John 15:13)

What do they make of us believers? I imagine that Christians sound simple-minded to people of “higher learning.” I probably looked like a simpleton, sitting in my college philosophy courses, smiling. I was smiling because I was thinking, “They’re trying everything but the Truth to make sense of life.” To me, all their rhetoric sounded like “blah, blah, blah.” When it came time to write a paper for one of my classes, I chose Augustine’s Confessions. After reading my paper, the professor told me I should join his profession. Not hardly – not then, and not now. I still say it’s all “blah, blah, blah.” I mean, how can you know the unchanging Truth and even entertain man’s variable notions of ethics? That is, whatever you choose to call your standard, if it’s not fixed in the Truth but floats with the prevailing wind of thought, your ethical answers can change. What happens, for example, if the world “evolves” to the point where it becomes “useful” to terminate someone’s pointless existence?

If I, as a Christian, sound foolish for holding to the unchanging standard, so be it. The Apostle Paul, who is scorned along with Christianity by the bio-ethicist I mentioned, said, “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corin. 1:18) And God “chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.” (1 Corin. 1:27) Along with Paul, I ask, “Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” (1 Corin. 1:20)

What is God’s wisdom? Consider this simple story (Luke 2:25-38):

Eight days after Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph took Him to Jerusalem to “present Him to the Lord.” Simeon was there; he was an old man who had been told by the Spirit that he would not die without seeing the Messiah. He spoke of Jesus’ destiny: “Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

As he was speaking, a woman of “great age” – at least 84 years old – came in. Her name was Anna, and she was a prophetess. She immediately started giving thanks to God, then “spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.”

Both Simeon and Anna served the Lord that day. One declared Jesus' destiny; the other witnessed. But it is not their roles or usefulness as servants that strikes me most about this story. It is a truth much more profound, and yes, simpler. So simple that you might miss it: The most important moment in their lives happened at the end of their lives.



8-13-05

Would You Have it Any Other Way?

It's 8:30 Friday morning. I've been up since 5:30, thinking about a man I prayed for yesterday. His name is Richard. I've been visiting him, talking to him, praying over him and reading the Word to him since February, when he fell into a coma. I can't forget him, even if others have. I promised him that I'd never give up on him, because God would never give up on him. So I keep praying for him.

I'm glad that people have never stopped praying for *me*. Like my mother. She turns 71 today. All those years, and she's never stopped praying. She began praying for me before I was even born. I wasn't supposed to be born alive, you see. My blood contained the Rh factor; hers didn't. That made my body a threat to hers. Her antibodies set out to destroy me. She prayed that I would not merely survive, which was improbable, but that I would thrive, which was almost impossible.

I'm here today, having celebrated my own birthday 11 days ago. I am a product of prayer, and of a mother's belief that with God, all things are possible.

She's never quit praying for me. The other day, in tears, she told me, "You don't know how many times a day I pray for you." I've prayed for her, too, since I was very little, because this woman who constantly prays for me has her own share – *more* than her share – of challenges. "Challenges" is a euphemism; she's been assaulted. Rheumatoid arthritis, breast cancer, fibromyalgia, frozen joints, thyroid disease, fibrocystic disease, not to mention repeated heartache. I found out just this week that my dear mother feels responsible for the health problems I've had since birth. She made the choice to have me, knowing the risks, the virtual impossibility that I'd be born "normal." Knowing the answer, I asked her, "Would you have it any other way? Aren't you glad I'm here?"

I think about when God created us. He went through with it, knowing full well that we weren't going to be born "normal." He knew the mess we'd make of our lives. He knew the heartache we'd experience. He knew the pain and the sickness and the sin we would have to overcome. Yet He created us anyway. Why? Can't we ask Him now, knowing the answer, "Would you have it any other way?"

He can't imagine a life without you -- every one of you, as if you were the only living being on the face of the earth. Every life matters to him, even the most sinful, fallen life. Even the life that has turned away from Him. He wants it back. He wants you back. Every single one of you. "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." (Matt. 18:14) That's how He looks at you – as a little one. A precious one. A lamb. He would leave the 99 – to find you. (Luke 15:4)

We've all heard John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Whosoever" means you. He gave His Son for you. He sacrificed something that was *His*, for your sake. But that was not His *first* sacrifice. The first sacrifice followed man's first refusal to ask for forgiveness. (Think of that: Adam and Eve could have asked for forgiveness!) In spite of their refusal, God sacrificed something on their behalf. He clothed them with skins – from animals He created. He sacrificed part of His own creation to clothe and protect His disobedient, unrepentant children.

It's important to see how God has sacrificed for us. It was important to Cain and Abel; one of them failed in his sacrifice. Cain offered fruit from the ground that was cursed. Abel offered the fat portion from some of the firstborn lambs. We can see that Cain knew what was right, because God asked him, "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" (Gen. 4:7) How did he know what was

right? He had God's own example.

Our model for sacrifice comes from God. It is found in Jesus. He washed His disciples' feet, telling them to use this act as their example. "As I have done for you, so should you do for one another." (John 13:14-15) Yes, it is true that we are no longer slaves but sons of God. (Gal. 4:7) But we sons are also to be servants, to freely choose, to make ourselves a "living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God." (Rom. 12:1)

Jesus' foot washing was not only a specific act; it was also an attitude. "The greatest among you is the servant of all." (Mark 10:44) When you make yourself a servant of all, you're not just "doing" isolated acts. God doesn't want what you can do; he wants you. And when He truly has you, you will naturally do what He wants, because what He wants becomes what you want! Your acts are expressions of His life in you, of the great yearning to do what He did. James said that faith without works is dead. That's because when we truly believe, when we know, when we are sacrificed to others as He is to us, we can't help but act. I can't help but pray for my friend Richard, because I believe it will help. But moreover, I have come to love him, even in his comatose state. When we believe, when we love, we naturally "do." If you're not doing, I would ask if you believe. I would ask if you love.

But what of those who can't get out and "do"? Consider another example from God. "We do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession *for us* with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession *for the saints* according to the will of God." (Rom. 8:26-27)

That means that the Holy Spirit prays for us. In other words, *God* prays for us. Can you imagine that? And why does He do it? Because He loves us. When we give our lives to this loving God, can we really call it a "sacrifice," when we get Him in exchange?

And does it seem like any kind of sacrifice to wake up at 5:30 in the morning because you simply have to pray for someone?

Would you have it any other way?



8-27-05

Happy Endings

We all like stories with happy endings, don't we? Well, I want to tell you a story . . .

It's about a woman who was going through some hard times. She'd gone through hard times before, but they seemed to end, like chapters in a book. This struggle, however, seemed to have chapters and chapters and chapters.

As she was walking up the stairs in her house one day, she asked the Lord for a word. He told her, "Psalm 38." She went into her room and got out her King James Bible, expecting to find some word of encouragement or hope.

This is what she read:

"O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh."

Yes, that sounded like what she felt. She continued to read. "I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the

disquietness of my heart.” Boy, had she roared on occasion! “Forgive me, Lord.” She read on. “Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee. My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me. My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off.” That struck a chord in her heart. Her friends had all but disappeared. “It’s okay,” she’d told herself.

“They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and imagine deceits all the day long.” She remembered how a rumor had circulated that she was crazy. Her children had heard it. “Hey, if I’m the town’s entertainment, fine,” she’d said.

“But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth. Thus I was as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs. For in thee, O Lord, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord my God. For I said, Hear me, lest otherwise they should rejoice over me: when my foot slippeth, they magnify themselves against me.” *Finally!* she thought. *Some encouragement.*

She read more. “For I am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me.” Oh, man! More of that? “For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin. But mine enemies are lively, and they are strong: and they that hate me wrongfully are multiplied. They also that render evil for good are mine adversaries; because I follow the thing that good is. Forsake me not, O Lord: O my God, be not far from me. Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation.” Yes, Lord, make haste!

When she reached the end, she asked, “Lord, where’s the comfort in that?” Where was the happy ending? Where was the promise of relief? Even as she asked the question, she knew the answer. She didn’t need another promise. She knew God’s promises. One more promise would seem like one more promise that didn’t apply to her. She felt unseen, unheard, unworthy to receive God’s promised blessings.

And her way of “dealing” with that was skimming over the griefs in her life, claiming they did not bother her, looking brave to the world, and to herself. The world would not see, she would not see, if she hid her disappointments in her heart. If she hid her sorrows in her heart.

She had hid them, but not from the Lord. “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.” (Psalm 139:7-8) She had hid her sorrows from herself. She had even forgotten many. But the Lord had not forgotten any. He had seen them all. He knew her heart.

And He knew that her heart was not the place to keep sorrows, to store them up. Sorrow and grief do not belong in the heart. If you plant them there, if you hide them there, they don’t go away. They grow. No, they belong on the cross. “Surely He has borne our pains and carried our sorrows.” (Isaiah 53:4)

Jesus Himself knows sorrows and grief. “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” (Isaiah 53:3) Yes, Jesus knows grief. He knows *your* grief.

But, I ask, do *you* know?

Do you know that the first stage of grief, as identified by the mental health profession, is *not* knowing? That the first thing we do when we hurt is to deny it? Do you know that the final stage of grief is acceptance? Not resignation. Not pretending everything’s okay. Not putting on a happy face. Not skipping over everything and getting to the happy ending. Not hiding your pain and grief in your heart.

The final chapter in the book is Jesus, comforting all that mourn, giving them “beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the

garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” (Isaiah 61:2-3) But before you get to the end of your book, let one of your chapters be a chapter where you stop hiding and let yourself see what God sees. Because freedom from pain usually requires that we first *see* it. *God* sees it. If you doubt that, I will tell you what He told me: “Psalm 38.”



9-24-05

Sit Down

I have a funny story to tell you – funny in the “so-appropriate” sense.

I wrote two stories for today, and neither one worked. Neither felt right. So I tried again, just an hour before I had to get on the road. That was nerve-wracking, to say the least. I wanted to do a good job, but how could I, with such a short amount of time? I started telling, “I can’t do it!” Lately, that has been the theme of my life. I imagine God saying, “You can’t do it? Well, duh.”

Yesterday afternoon, this same theme emerged. I’d been assigned to work on a logo. I don’t like creating logos. It’s frustrating, to create something unique and self-contained and powerful without being obvious, something that matches an idea other people have in their head. Often, all they can tell you, after you’ve spent 10 hours on a logo, is “it’s not quite what I had in mind.”

Anyway, I sat down and started. I tried this, and I tried that. I stared at my computer screen. How about this? No. How about that? I said aloud, “Yuck.” Then I started telling myself other things. “I have no business doing this. I’m not a good graphic designer. I’m a writer. Why do they give me things like this? I should give this back and say I just can’t do it.” Of course, they had given me the work because they believed I could do it. I didn’t.

At this point, that’s exactly what I told the Lord. Looking at the stupid stuff I’d come up with, I said, “Lord, I can’t do this.” I wasn’t giving up. If I’d given up, I would have packed up the job folder and walked away from my computer. Instead, I sat there.

I’d like to say that some grand image flashed through my head, the answer to my problem. It didn’t. Still I sat there. I tried this, and I tried that, only this time something was different. I tried things that didn’t seem to make logical sense to me. I kept going. I stopped when it felt right. I didn’t know why. It just did.

I showed it to the associate creative director. He began telling me all the ways that it coordinated perfectly with the other designs the agency had previously done for the client – of which I had no knowledge. I showed the logo to the account executive. He said, “It’s perfect. Absolutely perfect. It’s exactly what I had in mind. Exactly.”

I smiled, because I felt like laughing. If they had only known what I’d been telling myself two hours earlier! Now I feel like laughing again – and this is the reason this story is “funny.” I sat down today to write about frustration – only to feel completely frustrated by the process. I actually considered “winging” it, but that thought scared me. So I sat down again.

There’s a theme here, besides frustration. The Lord gave me this passage this morning. It’s from Luke 5. After teaching, Jesus told Simon Peter, “Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.” So, here’s Peter, probably very frustrated that they’d fished all night and caught nothing. It probably seemed crazy to go out and try again. But what did he say? “Nevertheless at thy word.” In essence, he put out his nets and sat down.

I want to make a quick side trip here. I looked up the word “frustrate” last night, when I knew what God wanted me to talk about. It has two definitions. One is to “to cause feelings of discouragement or bafflement.” Likely, Peter felt discouraged. His own efforts had gotten him nowhere. The other definition of frustrate is this: “To prevent from accomplishing a purpose or fulfilling a desire; to thwart.”

Now, go back to what Peter said – “nevertheless at thy word” – and think about something God said about His Word. “It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:11) So, His Word ultimately accomplishes what He sent it to accomplish. His Word will not ultimately be frustrated. It will not, in the end, be thwarted. But we have a part to play. When we say, “Nevertheless, at thy word,” we cast aside our own feelings of frustration in favor of His Word, of His promises. Despite our frustration, we choose not to frustrate His purposes.

Can we frustrate God? That’s a loaded question, isn’t it? If we can choose our own will, can’t we frustrate what He wants? What if Jesus had said “My will” instead of “Thy will”? Didn’t Adam say “my will” – “I’ll do what I want”? And then what happened?

We can also frustrate God’s gifts to us, as the Apostle Paul tells us: “I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.” We can frustrate God – by frustrating His grace! We can thwart what He wants to do through us by using our own efforts to figure it all out and then “do” accordingly. The Law tells us what to “do.” Grace tells us what we’ve been given, through none of our own effort.

“But I want to ‘do’ something for God, for people,” you say. Yes, absolutely. But have you considered that what you want to do and what God wants you to do may be different? That He may actually be making you uncomfortable – or frustrated – because He’s trying to frustrate – to thwart – your own plans in favor of His? Maybe He’s telling you, very simply, “Sit down.” And that can be a hard thing. Sometimes believing is harder than doing. It’s more natural to strive than to sit down.

I’ll close as Peter’s fishing excursion closed. “And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.” They were astonished, but they may have been more surprised by what Jesus said next. Despite Peter’s initial frustration and “failure” to believe, Jesus said, “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.”

That’s a pretty good promotion, isn’t it? And how did he arrive at it? Well, this may not sound as eloquent as Jesus or Paul would put it, but here’s my rendition: He sat down.



10-8-05

The End of Myself

I could talk about so many things today. In fact, I wrote about several. But every time I finished a story, I would imagine your faces while I read it, and I’d think, “This doesn’t speak to them.” The topics I chose were valid, but did they get to the heart of where you are – and what’s in your heart?

With your faces in my mind’s eye, one thing kept coming to me: getting to the end of myself. Sitting or lying where you are, do you feel like you have come to the end of yourself? Like you have no strength or control over your body or your life? I understand that feeling. After years of battling illness, which has intensified lately, I have gotten very, very tired, all the way to the bone. Because I’m unable to eat much without pain, I don’t eat much. What I do eat isn’t adequately absorbed. That leaves me with, as I told a friend yesterday, about 12 ounces of energy a day – and the overriding feeling that I am coming to the end of myself.

I read passages about God strengthening people, and I feel encouraged. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” the Apostle Paul writes. (Phil. 4:13) I read about the ministering angels who strengthened Jesus after He was tested in the desert. (Matt. 4:11) I read what the Lord told Paul after he’d asked that a messenger of Satan be removed. “My grace is sufficient for you: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corin. 12:9)

Every day, when I reach the end of my strength, I ask the Lord for His strength. One day, walking through the grocery store with my son Dain, I suddenly felt too weak to get the two small things we'd come for. One of those things was for him, and I couldn't bear disappointing him. So I stood in the produce department and prayed, softly but aloud. "Lord, give me strength." We walked out of that store with two unexpected treasures for him – a free hat and a free car, based on our purchase of that one item for him.

Yesterday afternoon, with nearly three more hours until the end of my workday, I once again came to the end of myself. I wanted to go home, but then I remembered my conversation with the Creative Director the day before. She was concerned about me, asking how I could keep hanging on. I told her, "It is not my strength I rely on. God gives me strength." So, with my own words echoing in my head, I once again prayed for strength. For the next half hour, the workload that had inundated me all day unexpectedly eased up. While I waited for work, I explored the Psalms, looking for passages about rejoicing. By the time I'd read ten Psalms, I was not only more energetic, I was overflowing with joy.

It made me think of a time when my husband, Mitch, and I were talking to each other and to the Lord. I don't remember all that we said, but I do remember what the Lord told me. Mitch was feeling down, once again, about the state of my health. Things looked bleak. As I closed my eyes, I heard the Lord tell me, "Rejoice radically. Rejoice irrationally." And I just got happy. It made no sense. Don't we usually need a reason to rejoice? I guess that's why it seemed irrational! But we went to the grocery store and quite literally danced in the aisles. Some corny music would play on the store's sound system, and Mitch would grab my hand or I'd throw my arms around his neck, and we would just dance, turning circles and laughing.

As I read the Psalms yesterday, I had that image and God's words in my head. "Rejoice radically. Rejoice irrationally." David seemed to have good reason to rejoice; he had seen God's victory over his enemies. But many times, when he was downcast and in despair, not seeing the victory, he declared that he would rejoice anyway. Irrational, it would seem to the world, but logical to him, because he trusted the Lord. He believed the Lord would deliver him. And he knew his God. Listen to the words of Psalm 13:

"How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me? Consider and hear me, O Lord my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved. *But* I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me."

We do have reason to rejoice, even if our current states cry out "unfair" or "defeated" or "weak." The one consistent theme for the reason for our rejoicing is that God delivers us – specifically through His Son, Jesus. Passages in Isaiah also joyfully foretell His coming, and our reason for rejoicing. "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you. . . . And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." (Isaiah 35:3-4, 10)

You know, the ways of heaven seem paradoxical. "The last shall be first," "Happy are they that mourn," "He who seeks to save his life shall lose it." The Lord seems to acknowledge the paradox by showing us that heaven is not the mirror reflection of this world, but this world turned inside out and upside down. He acknowledged the paradox that when He told me to rejoice "irrationally."

He acknowledged the paradox when He told Paul, "My strength is made perfect in weakness." But it's really not a paradox, or a contradiction. Do you know what "perfect" means? It doesn't just mean without flaw. It means complete. Whole. Finished. In our weakness, when we come to the end of ourselves, and give ourselves over to Him and His finishing process, He can have full reign. When we get all of ourselves out of the way, He is free to come in and fill us up not only with strength, but with Himself. As John the Baptist said, "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30)

Or, as I realized the other day, and told the Lord, “The end of myself is the beginning of You.”



10-15-05

You Don't Have to Hide

Do you know the parable of the talents? To put it briefly, three servants were each given a number of talents. Two multiplied their talents but the third man hid his talent in the ground. He explained why: “Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground.” (Matt. 25:24-25) He was afraid because He believed his master was a hard, unjust man. His reaction was to hide.

We, too, often hide, fearing because we believe that God is a hard Master. Perhaps we've been taught that God won't bless us unless we do something for Him, or that God allows suffering to “teach” us something, or that God wants us to be completely stripped of everything we have and are before we're worthy to serve Him. When I say, “stripped,” what do you think of? I think of being naked. Exposed. Totally vulnerable.

I think of Adam, who, after sinning, suddenly became aware that he was naked. And that made him afraid. Afraid of what? Afraid of whom? Maybe he didn't even know; maybe he became afraid of everything – because he became aware of everything. Do you remember what he “gained” by eating the forbidden fruit? The knowledge of good and evil. An awareness of evil. And it made him afraid. Afraid even of God, who never intended us to know evil, who never wanted us to feel naked and exposed, who only wanted to protect us.

Oddly, one of the effects of knowing both good and evil, but having only limited capacity to understand them, is that we unwittingly ascribe evil to the One who can do no evil. It seems that we can only barely distinguish between good and evil, that we don't fully understand the difference. Ironically, because we believe in a loving, powerful God, we conclude that everything that happens is something He ordained for us. Did He want Adam to sin? Does He want us to sin? Obviously not. But, out of love, He gives us a choice. “I set before you this day life and death. Therefore choose life.”

Think of Him as an umbrella. He wants you to stay “under” Him. But if you don't, and you get wet, is that the Umbrella's doing? When His purpose is to protect?

God's nature is to protect. The man who buried his talent was afraid because He didn't understand the nature of his master. We often don't understand the nature of *our* Master. We think He's capable of being a “hard man.” But it's our very awareness of both good and evil that confuses us. What we know of the world seems to leak over into what we believe about God. We're so accustomed to how the world has treated us, that we think God is capable of the same behavior. We start to confuse God with the world. I'll give you an analogy. I sometimes catch myself thinking that my husband, Mitch, is capable of acting like my ex-husband. I basically confuse the two. “Hello,” Mitch will say, “*I* am your husband.” When we confuse the world with God, we need to hear Him say, “Hello, *I* am the Lord your God.”

We need to understand the nature and the character of God. If we don't, we could find ourselves believing that He could hurt us. We know how man can break our hearts. What happens to our hearts when we believe that the One dearest to us could hurt us?

Yet many people believe just that. Knowing their experience with man – that is, knowing good and evil – they *confuse* good and evil. They confuse God's work with Satan's work. They confuse God's character with Satan's character. “If you do not believe *Me*,” Jesus said, “then at least believe the works that I do.” (John 10:38, 14:11) And what did He do? He healed and saved people. That's what we're to believe about God, about His character.

We're not to believe that God can act like a "hard man." If we do, we'll stop talking to Him. That's what I did. I felt like that man who hid his talent. I felt like Adam, who hid himself from God. I hid from Him, only to realize how terribly alone I felt. And that's exactly what Satan wants. He wants to separate us from God, as he has been separated from Him; he wants us to stop talking to God; he wants us to hide; he wants us to feel exposed, naked, alone.

The world will help you feel alone. My ex-husband told my son Ryan that he needed to learn to "sink or swim" on his own. I told Ryan instead, "If there's a lesson I want you to learn, it's that you can count on the people who love you. That you're not alone."

Sickness can make you feel alone. Leviticus reads, "And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean. All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be." (Leviticus 13:45-47) Talk about utter aloneness.

But don't believe that because this world has left you alone, God has or ever will. Even if you've forgotten Him, He has not forgotten you. One of the first things God said about us was this: "It is not good that the man should be alone." (Gen. 2:18) And one of the last things Jesus said was this: "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." (John 16:32) If Jesus needed to remember that He was not alone, don't you?

He might have made you naked, but He never intended for you to be exposed, alone and afraid. He made you naked, because nothing is supposed to get in the way of a pure, undefiled relationship with Him. When He says, "Trust Me," He's saying, "You can trust Me."

You *can* trust Him with your nakedness. You don't have to hide.



10-29-05

By Appointment Only

This may be one of the hardest stories I've tried to tell. Not because it's personal, but precisely because it's not.

A woman, who shall remain nameless, saw a local pastor, who shall also remain nameless, in the parking lot of her son's school. She wanted to ask him a couple questions but thought it impolite to accost him in the parking lot, so she asked if she could come and see him. He told her to call his assistant.

The woman called the assistant, who immediately launched into a detailed explanation of why scheduling an appointment would be highly unlikely and completely impossible without first going through the "appointment request" process. She would need to fill out an "appointment request form," which would then be evaluated to see if she qualified to talk to this pastor. "He gets calls from all over the country and the world," the assistant said, as if that explained everything. In other words, "Who are *you*?"

"I understand," the woman said, and she did understand, more than she wanted to. Her feelings were not hurt. She hurt somewhere else – in her spirit. And the pain was not for herself.

Because of this extensive gate-keeping, she wondered, "How could anyone come to him for something they need?" She thought of the people she'd seen in pain. Could they go to him? But moreover, would *he* ever go to *them*? Or tell others to go to them? Tell them to visit the sick, the imprisoned, the hungry? The woman wrote to a friend, "It's no wonder that more people don't go visit others in need, when some pastors keep themselves locked up and away from the people they're supposed to serve (the body of

Christ). If we can't go see them, why would we expect them to come and see us?"

As I thought about this woman's story last night, several Scriptures came to mind. In Matthew, chapter 22, Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment." (Matt. 22:37-38) Men like this pastor – who is really just a representative of a larger mindset – love God. They proclaim Jesus as the Son of God. They acknowledge Him as the source of their gifts. They do wonderful things in His name.

But do they remember what Jesus said next, right after He said that the greatest commandment was to love God? He said, "And the second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matt. 22:39)

Sounds good, but what does that mean? I recalled the story of Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, who sought out Jesus to heal his daughter. While Jesus was on His way, He was delayed by a woman with "an issue of blood," and Jairus' daughter died. This woman had messed up his schedule and someone died as a result. But was Jesus worried? Did it throw Him? No, He told Jairus, "Be not afraid, only believe." (Mark 5:36)

As I again thought about the story of the woman and the pastor, I became troubled. I wasn't sure how to tell the story without sounding harsh or judgmental. "As you judge, so shall you be judged." Sure enough, if I found fault with someone, that exact accusation might be leveled at me some day. But more than that, I didn't want to come across as somehow "superior," for the Word says, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves." (Philip. 2:3)

So I asked the Lord to forgive this man, and to bless him, and to bring the light of understanding to him. Then I asked the Lord what I should say today, if anything. A few minutes later, while I was thinking about something else, I suddenly heard a Scripture passage. "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name? And in Your name cast out devils? And in Your name done many wonderful works?" (Matt. 7:22) You know the passage. Jesus answered them, "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity." (Matt. 7:23)

I have to admit, that passage had puzzled and troubled me for a long time. Who are these that work iniquity? And what does it mean, "I never knew you"? Of course, Jesus knows who we are. He knows our thoughts and our hearts. How could He say that He never knew us?

Well, think about it this way: If you know someone, if you have a relationship with them, they also know *you*, right? So, when Jesus said, "I never knew you," He could have instead said, "You never knew *Me*."

And that's exactly how I heard it in my head this morning. "Get away from me, you workers of iniquity, for you never knew Me." I knew what He was saying: "You never knew My *heart*."

What it comes down to is this: We can do all these things in the name of the Lord, but if we don't operate with an understanding of His heart – of His love, of His immediacy, His availability – we do not truly follow Him. We aren't operating from His heart. "And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing." (1 Corin. 13:2)

Jesus doesn't carry a stack of appointment request forms. He doesn't ask, "Who are *you*?" To those who say, "I am not worthy that You should come under my roof," Jesus says, "I will come."



Big Love

For as long as I can remember, I've thought about God as a "big" being. When I thought of Him walking through the garden, I imagined Him towering over the trees, maybe parting them as He looked for Adam. I wondered how He managed not to smash everything, being so big.

My mental picture made sense for a long time. Wouldn't the Creator of a huge universe naturally also be huge? And if He's omnipresent – everywhere at the same time – wouldn't His Spirit have to be big, even if His "body" were not? But then one day, I realized that my image of God was like the giant in Gulliver's Travels – so huge that people looked like mites in comparison. And they were so scared of him that they tied him up with a million tiny strings. I related the image to my husband, who found an excerpt from a Monty Python skit that made me laugh:

Chaplain (Paul): Let us praise God, O Lord ...

Congregation (Lori): O Lord ...

Chaplain: Ooh, You are so big ...

Congregation: ...ooh, You are so big ...

Chaplain: ...So absolutely huge.

Congregation: ... So absolutely huge.

Chaplain: Gosh, we're all really impressed down here, I can tell You.

Congregation: Gosh, we're all really impressed down here, I can tell You.

Chaplain: Forgive us, O Lord, for this, our dreadful toadying, and ...

Congregation: And barefaced flattery.

Chaplain: But You are so strong and, well, just so super.

Congregation: Fantastic.

Chaplain: Amen.

Congregation: Amen.

And you thought I could only be serious! Well, there is a serious point to this. We get weird ideas about God, don't we? Some of them even seem Scriptural. And we begin to base our whole lives on them. We take what we *think* we know about God and make everything fit into our ideas – our ideologies, our man-made theologies. We discard or rationalize anything that doesn't fit with those "-ologies."

I'll give you an example. Some say that Jesus never turned anyone away. And that's true – at least ultimately. But there was a Canaanite woman (a Greek Syrophenician) who was seeking healing for her daughter. She did eventually receive it, but Jesus first said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." She answered, "Yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." (Matt. 15:21-28, Mark 7:25-30)

I had never really understood that passage. It didn't seem to fit into the theology of Jesus' never refusing anyone. So I asked the Lord, "Did You change Your mind about healing her? And if so, why?" After all this wondering, I finally asked – and got an answer. He said, "She recognized that she didn't deserve it."

She had called herself a dog. She knew she didn't deserve mercy. She had no covenant with God. It required faith to call on a promise that didn't belong to her but to the children of Israel. That covenant didn't belong to us gentiles, either, until Jesus became our covenant, and offered Himself to us.

I'd never seen this before – until I asked. Let me ask *you* something: Who asks the most questions? Children. Why? Because they

don't think they know everything. They are open to new information. A child-like person asks because he doesn't know. A childish person thinks he knows it all already. A childish person thinks he's entitled to something, and demands it. A child-like person knows he deserves nothing and is therefore very grateful. He who has been forgiven much loves much. (Luke 7:46) I know a co-worker who thinks he's getting less than he's entitled to, as a permanent or "covenant" employee. I also know a woman – a temporary employee -- who walks into the office every day, grateful for any work at all. Guess who's happier?

Jesus calls us to be as children in respect to the world, innocent of its ways, but mature in our understanding. (1 Corin. 14:20) Childlikeness is based on a sense of gratitude, openness, trust, reliance on someone else who knows better. It is not childishness. The Apostle wrote, "When I was a child, I thought as a child. But when I became a man, I put away childish things." (1 Corin. 13:11) Childishness is based on a sense of entitlement, pride, immaturity and fear – even if unintentional.

When I was 10, I had to go into the hospital because the doctors thought I had leukemia. I was scared – not of being sick, but of being alone in that huge, unfamiliar place. To beat back the fear, I smiled as hard as I could, thinking that if I smiled hard enough, I would stop sobbing.

Sounds odd, doesn't it? But I thought that I needed to protect myself; I knew of no other protection. When you feel unprotected, your choices seem to be these: protect yourself, or *deny* that you're in harm's way. It was a childish choice, but you know what? I've been doing that very thing, in a way, ever since. Both choices have led to a sense of hyper-vigilance that wakes me up and keeps me up at 3:00 in the morning.

What don't I understand about God, that I would simply stay in fear? Yesterday, the Lord reminded me of this memory: When I was in that hospital, my father stayed every night until I fell asleep, and arrived every morning before I woke up, so that I would never be awake and alone. He'd seen my attempts to make myself feel okay. He wasn't fooled by that desperate smile of denial. He knew I needed help.

And, at 4:00 this morning, renewing His mercies once again, God showed me something else. Yes, the word "big" does apply to Him. But not in our mental, childish understanding of Him. To us child-like creatures, He is indeed big, but in this way: He is Big Love.



12-3-05

Transparent, Not Invisible

Sometimes I really don't like writing for this program.

Now, while you get over the shock of that statement, I'll explain: I love to help, that's something I won't deny. But helping often comes at the cost of revealing things I'd rather not show.

I have a feeling that's the way many in the ministry feel, but they've become convinced that showing weakness means they're not good standard-bearers. So they hide. They cover up their transparency.

I come from a family whose members fall into one of two categories: brutally honest or tenderly merciful. I jump from camp to camp. I never want to hurt anyone, but I can't help saying what I believe to be the truth. So I try to be lovingly honest. "Let all that you do be done with love." (1 Corin. 16:14)

I've had to come to grips with my headlong personality, inside a person who gets hurt like anyone else. I see things that are tough to see, then I don't always know what to do with that information. I'm pretty sensitive to what people are feeling – and that does

not always seem like a good thing. I'll give you an example. For two years, I've worked with a man – a writer – who has never looked me in the eye or spoken a word to me that was not in response to a direct question. In a group of any size, he'll talk to anyone but me – like I'm invisible. I asked the Lord, "Why won't he even look at me?" He said, "He *can't* look at you." I understood: he isn't rejecting *me*. Something *about* me makes him uncomfortable. Now, maybe it's just a cop-out; maybe he just doesn't like me. But I believe it's the Spirit who dwells in me – and my transparency about who I am. I don't wear cool or expensive jewelry; I wear a cross. I don't hang out after work to drink; I go home to write about God. I don't wish people "good luck with that"; I tell them that I'll pray for them.

It's clear that I'm a Christian. I don't walk around preaching, but everyone in that office knows that I'll gladly do whatever they need. Most are very open and appreciative. But not this man. He is smart, witty, engaging, well-read and well-educated – and, it occurred to me yesterday – self-sufficient. If he needs anything, you'd never know it. He'd certainly never admit it. I feel very needy by comparison – and I try not to show it, because I know that such transparency is not highly valued by people who easily conquer problems or never "have" them to begin with.

But who never has problems? There is no temptation "but such as is common to man." (1 Corin. 10:13) How can you live in this world and just skate by? Or pretend that everything is fine?

I walked into the room of a man who was dying, painfully. "Happy Thanksgiving," my friend told the man. I wanted it to be a happy Thanksgiving, but I couldn't let it go at that. I took his hand and said, "It's not a very happy day for you, though, is it?" Here I was being brutally honest, but out of love – because what he needed more than anything at that moment was to know that someone saw the truth.

That's how God made me. Maybe it's too real for most people. Maybe I'm too transparent. Maybe I'm prone to be rejected because of it.

"Oh, well," I say. Jesus knew *true* rejection. He knew shame. He didn't hesitate to suffer in front of people. "He was despised and rejected of men. We esteemed Him not."

This time of year, we talk about Jesus' birth, which led to His eventual rejection – a rejection that bought our acceptance. I love God's paradoxes. Rejected by the world; accepted by God. Abandoned by the world; adopted by God.

Speaking of being adopted, have you ever thought about that process? On some level, those given up for adoption likely feel rejected. But don't they also feel wanted? Someone wanted them enough to go through a lengthy process to "get" them.

In our stories of faith, we tend to talk about going after God to "get" Him: trying hard to believe Him, crawling through a crowd to reach Him, begging for His mercy, hoping that He will not reject us. But I tell you, God is going hard after *you*. He is out searching for you, His sheep. "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying?" (Matt. 18:11-12)

He wants to adopt you. He came to get you. "When we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" (Gal. 4:3-6)

Did you notice the language here? God *sent* His Son; He has *sent* His Spirit. Jesus said, "I am *sent* to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." He sends, we receive. In that order. Our job, as we are reminded this Advent season, is that His advent is sure; that He will come. "Immanuel will come to you, O Israel," as the song goes. Or as in Matthew, "Behold, your King comes unto you." (Matt. 21:5)

Yes, it is true that those who seek the Lord will find Him. But it is He who has been calling you, seeking you, all this time. “I will draw all men unto Me.” (John 12:32) It is the Spirit of Truth who is speaking to and seeking all men. (John 15:26)

Now, that man at work may not know it, but the Spirit is calling and seeking him, too. And that’s been my prayer for him, and many others I know: that the Spirit would continually testify of Jesus. Even if He has to do it through me and make me very uncomfortable and very rejected. Even if the Spirit of Truth – the Spirit of transparency, if you will – has to use *my* transparency.



12-17-05

Watch and Wait

This time of year, we often hear the story of Jesus’ birth, from the second chapter of Luke. An angel declared to the shepherds, “I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11) Isn’t it wonderful? But it’s the preceding chapter of Luke that really gets to me.

The angel Gabriel told Mary, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” (Luke 1:26-34)

“Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest.” Just saying that brings tears to my eyes. I wonder how anyone who reads that could doubt that Jesus is the Messiah. Surely they can feel the power of the Holy Spirit in those words. Surely the Spirit of Truth speaks of Jesus to them.

Those words are powerful not only because they speak of Jesus, but also because they speak of something yet to happen. Something conceived but not yet born. It takes faith – it takes the power of God – to believe that something unseen could become seen. To me, there is no life apart from that faith. It is not seeing, but believing, that sustains and even thrills me.

That doesn’t mean I don’t struggle. It’s like I told my husband the other night: “One part of me has sadness in it, but the other has this inexplicable joy. It’s the joy of the Lord.” That joy just can’t be shaken, for it is “born not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God.” (1 Peter 1:23)

I was having trouble sleeping the other night, which is a regular occurrence and a result of illness. I know this torment will end, but I wonder what I’m supposed to do about it. Speak to it, cast it onto God, think of good things, talk to Him about it, ask people to pray? Nothing has worked. This all-consuming tension just doesn’t go away. I’m tired but wired. Finally, the Lord got a word in edgewise, and said, “There’s nothing you can do. So just watch and wait.” Just hearing Him comforted me, but I also took solace in what He told me: all I had to “do” was watch and wait.

That doesn’t really sound like “doing” anything, does it? But waiting can be hard work. During this holiday season, shoppers are waiting in line, drivers are waiting in traffic, travelers are waiting in airports, and, of course, kids are waiting for Christmas morning. Some kinds of waiting are easier than others. If you’re a kid, you may be eagerly waiting. There’s a hopeful expectancy.

I wonder how well Mary waited while she was expecting to deliver the Son of the Highest. What was she feeling? Surely she could feel God’s presence; even the baby carried by her cousin Elizabeth perceived the Lord, jumping for joy inside the womb. (Luke 1:41)

Mary had nine months to consider what Gabriel had said about the birth of her son. Was she filled with anticipation? Or uncertainty?

Ah, there's the question – and the other part of what the Lord told me: “Watch.” Would that command soothe me, if I didn't believe something good was on the way? What would I be watching for? “Wait and watch” is not the same as “wait and see.” When you wait and see, you reserve judgment. When you wait and watch, you keep your eyes peeled for what you know is coming. You watch your mail because you believe a package has been sent.

History, nature, life and the Word are rife with stories of watching and waiting. The Jews waited for thousands of years for the Messiah. “And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” (Isaiah 25:8-9)

Christians are watching for Christ's return. “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and has long patience for it, until he receives the early and latter rain.” (James 5:7)

Simeon waited to personally see the baby Jesus. “And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.” (Luke 2:26)

The created world itself is waiting for physical redemption. “For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.” (Rom. 8:22)

God's Word tells us to watch and wait. “It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.” (Lamen. 3:26) “Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.” (2 Chron. 20:17) The Apostle Paul advises, “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.” (1 Corin. 16:13) David urges, “Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.” (Psalm 27:14) Why wait? As Isaiah said, “They shall not be ashamed that wait for me.” (Isaiah 49:23)

If we know our Maker, and know His nature, we don't worry while we wait. He is a Watchman who sees everything that's coming. And who has sent just the right person or the right word to help us. “He sent His Word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.” (Psalm 107:20)

Watch and wait. The Lord told me those words to comfort me, but He would tell you the same thing. The Son of the Highest, whose birth all the world once awaited, said, “And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.” (Mark 13:37)

