

Archived November-December

December 24, 2008

The Ornaments and the Tree of Christmas

Recently, my wife and I took a trip to visit friends and family in Tennessee. What took to be a 14 hour road trip from Texas (did I just say that?), turned out to be a long journey. All the while, we had a great time. For starters, the freeways were closed due to ice, which pushed our travel time way back. We managed to get some free coffee at the Hampton Inn, our new found favorite stop. Once back on the road, we got pulled over for driving in the left lane in Arkansas. Not kidding. It seems apparent that everyone needs something to do. My wife and I were laughing. Anyway. We drove to Memphis and stopped at Colletta's, who serves the best BBQ pizza as known by Elvis. More laughing. Before we knew it, we were caught in a snow and ice storm by the time we got to Nashville. Now, things were getting interesting. It took us about 1.5 hours driving on ice to get to my best friend's house. We drove deep into the woods. We got lost. I thought we almost had to ask a farmer if we could sleep over for the night. We eventually arrived at our friends. Not laughing, but relieved.

Next morning, well really, 5 hours later, we were on the road again. Sound fun? We stopped at Cracker Barrel for breakfast. Funny thing. Have you ever wondered where they actually keep the barrel filled with crackers? Back in the car, we took some awesome snowy Christmas country side photos of the Tennessee foothills. Finally, we made it to Aunt Bea's and our family. Yes, we actually have an Aunt Bea. No Mayberry. No Barney. But my Uncle Roy has a laugh like Goober.

My Aunt Bea is a mirror image of my dad. There is a deep and rich history of my family. Aunt Bea has 6 Christmas trees all through the house. She is widowed, but spends all her time with her remaining sisters and brothers. They all love finding estate sales and playing board games like Wahoo and Chicken Foot. Competition is pretty fierce with the family. They play for hours on end. Aunt Bea and her siblings carry on with life. You'd think Aunt Bea was seventeen again. In fact, her phone was ringing off the wall. Friends were calling all over to either invite us to a party or to come over and visit. Speaking of, we had several neighbors come by to see all the buzz. My heart was comforted to see how many people cared and looked after Aunt Bea and our family.

We headed out for a night of fun. My great aunts and uncles are all in their seventies and eighties. You would think at this age, they would be a bit tired or slow, but it was quite the opposite. They are not only young at heart, but young in their energy, tenacity and wit. We had a fantabulous time. Stirring up old memories and catching up with the new, it was difficult to call it a night. Even afterwards, we stopped at Uncle Dale's house to visit a bit longer.

The next day was filled with more family outings, coffee, dinner and board games. One night during our game, I couldn't help but noticing Aunt Bea's Christmas trees. The, something amazing hit me. In my mind, each event stuck out like a Christmas

ornament. I flashed back to when I was a child. I loved my grand parents, great uncles and aunts. However, as a kid, you get bored very easily. I found it hard to relate to my elderly relatives. Now, I see a different shine, but the same glimmer in their eyes. When I look at Aunt Bea and all her brothers and sisters, I see the years, history and wisdom in their faces. My perspective has changed.

I witnessed the gentle look in my Aunt Shirely's eyes of grace. Years of caring for her brother after he lost his wife. I listened and felt the struggle in Uncle Roy's naval stories of WWII. Like the time when the USS Whitehurst was struck by a kamikaze. This attack was survived by about 50, only 8 are still alive today. I was facilitated by the wisdom of Uncle Dale as seen through his spectacles. I was tickled by the laughter of my Aunt Verline. Then there was Aunt Bea. I noticed the lines of her face that crinkled around her eyes and mouth. This came from smiling and was the same in my daddy's face.

Photos, relics and gifts around the house were reminders of home and memories. When I gazed at my wife, I saw our home and cherished treasures. I could also see us carrying on in our old age. Still young in love and spirit. I could see our future children and the joys of life ahead in this moment of bliss. I was quickly reminded of God's hand over my life. Home really is where the heart is. The history of sacrifice, love and family lies deep in the Tennessee valley. I hear it calling to my wife and I like a whisper upon the wind.

It was really difficult to leave our family and head home. I understand what my Dad means when he says it's hard for him to leave. I truly experienced a unique time, wishing that it can be frozen forever. My home is not a location, but it is with my God, wife and family.

Another funny thing. When were young, we want to grow up so fast. When were old, we do everything we can to slow down. I remember being so impatient with my parents and wanting to move out as a pre-adult. I could not wait to grow up. The truth is, I am still growing up. Now I find myself wanting to rewind the years and enjoy the moments. It appears that we speed up only to slow down. Some day, the independence we once longed for will turn into a dependance of others. It seems like time is never enough. When our lives are over, was it really worth the race and battle? In the end, will we have anything to show for our efforts. Can we really guarantee ourselves that we will be satisfied? Have we really taken inventory of the time today to stop and consider the important things in life?

I thought about how we decorate trees at Christmas. We are hanging more than little toys, Santas, candy canes and ribbons. We are celebrating memories and what the icons of Christmas represent. Some good memories and some bad. In each moment, we find our comfort in the colors of faith, hope and love. Our trees are like testimonies of God's hand through every circumstance and provision. We see each promise, deliverance and future hope of things to come. The same tree we spruce up each year is the same that was cut down and prepared to be an altar for our Lord's sacrifice.

I pray this Christmas, Holiday Season and New Year, that you are filled with wonder and peace. The kind of peaceful love that surpasses your understanding. Let the love of God wrap around you. Be comforted in His blanket of love. Enjoy this season with the ones you love. Be reminded of that each decoration has not gone unnoticed nor cared for in the love of Christ.

December 3, 2008

Why Can't We All Just Get Along?

Sad to say, but Church maybe the last place to have relational difficulties. The truth: it's more prominent than we realize or would like to admit. Over the past two weeks, I've spoken to many worship leaders who tell me about this concern. A larger concern involves the volunteers in their own ministries. Like you, I hear of problems that spill into rehearsals, meetings and even awkward discussions that take place before worship. Are you kidding me? Well, the reality is, none of us are perfect. In fact, we suffer from the same condition as everyone else: being human. When you put anywhere from 100 to 3,000 in one room, you have that many more opinions and differences. Scary? Maybe. Outcome? Beautiful. Why? We are made in God's fabric of a kaleidoscope of colors and tones, likes and dislikes.

God loves us all the same in our array of contrasts. Why can't we love another just the same? It takes a lifetime for God to hammer out our hearts and minds, that's the beauty in this journey. None of us will have the same preferences and thoughts as the next person. Life would be boring. We can never change a person either. We are only to love one another as in the same love of Christ. Romans 12:16 puts it this way: "Live in harmony with each other. Do not be arrogant, but associate with humble people. Do not think that you are wiser than you really are."

Remember, when we lead worship with our teams, we are making more than just music. We are modeling the love of Christ. We model what it means to be in harmony with one another. We model what it means to be a leader of worship. We model what it means to lay our differences aside, pray, love and accept one another. Besides, did not Christ gird himself with a towel and wash the feet of his disciples. My friends in the same way, He commands us to do likewise.

November 11, 2008

Veteran's Day

Happy Veteran's Day! We commemorate all of you who have served and who are still serving our country today. This day is special to our family as both our sets of parents and extended family were in the armed forces. Each and everyday, beyond November 11th, is worth celebrating our freedom and celebrating the individuals who protect it. We would not be able to worship freely and have our homes and families safe without their love and loyalty to defend this great nation. We appreciate each of you and your families for your dedicated sacrifice and patriotism. We continue to pray for you as you remember, recover and help restore our United States of America. Thank you for

protecting, preserving and empowering our liberty. We join with you in the continued efforts of sustaining our country's freedom. May God's blessings flow and His Spirit continue to guide. We love you.

November 4, 2008
Election Day

Election Day is here in America. A day of choosing. A time to serve our country in performing our reasonable act of service through voting. Election Day is also a time when we think of liberty, patriotism and sacrifice. We have all the icons to help remind us of our heritage. I tend to think of our country's flag, in what it represents and means.

Remember the term "Old Glory,"? This famous name was coined by Captain William Driver, a shipmaster of Salem, Massachusetts, in 1831. As he was leaving on one of his many voyages aboard the brig CHARLES DOGGETT - and this one would climax with the rescue of the mutineers of the BOUNTY - some friends presented him with a beautiful flag of twenty four stars. As the banner opened to the ocean breeze for the first time, he exclaimed "Old Glory!"

Through generations, words and phrases have different meanings to everyone. In the Church, we have a vocabulary that underscores what we acknowledge, believe and live. Even terms like "offering," have their own associations. One person may think of the time when the organ is played during the passing of the plate. Another may think of sacrifice, mercy and submission. I like to think of Paul's exhortation as he instructed us to offer our bodies to the Lord as living sacrifices (Rm12:1). The clincher for me is found at the end of verse 1: "this is your spiritual act of worship." (NIV). My personal favorite is found in the NKJV, "which is your reasonable service." When is the last time you thought of your offering as a reasonable service, rather than a special-extra point?

Offering, sacrifice and obedience are three words that define our being and Christian heritage. As followers of Jesus, our reasonable service is to offer our daily lives to His will. We walk in His Spirit and choose the right ways of God to produce fruit. (Gal. 5:13-26). I am reminded of these truths even when I look at our own American flag. I see the red stripes of His offering and the white for His purity. The blue reminds me of His sacrifice and justice to save mankind. The stars help me remember that He is Maker and Creator of all life and the universe. In everything of who I am, He has made me to worship Him and to live as His sacrifice. Choose this day to offer yourself to His service on this election day and forever. (Jos. 24:15).

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