

Chronicles of Diversity

Your leadership weekly



The Order of Wilderness Stuff Trekking International, *Colored Stuff*

15 October 2003; Volume 5, Issue 36

We all had coloring books when we were kids. Chances are that our parents saved the best of these precious moments, and that they are now collecting dust somewhere. There may be some of those immortal pages hidden in some of the boxes I have yet to go through from my mother's estate. I do know she saved a collection of all types of high school memorabilia, some of which I knew nothing about.

Back to coloring books. I think I won a coloring prize, even before I really even went to school, but my memory fails me now. I do remember however, while those early friends of mine were smearing Mickey Mouse lime green, all over the page, I was carefully outlining the edges of each section of the drawing with an appropriate color, and then filling in the edged space.

I guess I really have never changed. I spend an incredible amount of time defining the edge lines in my life, and have never really stepped beyond those limits. I then rapidly filled in the field, probably missing much of the peace of that place of rest. Others I am beginning to more fully comprehend, really have not understood the importance of those lines, and have paid a steep price for their actions. But perhaps they do enjoy some of the pleasures of not understanding the limits before you begin to color. There is a price for always staying within the lines, but that price is insignificant when compared to the alternative.

So the bottom line proverb is: We either color our stuff, or our stuff colors us. That is the way that God made it. Now I could stop there and be finished for the week but the little marker at the edge of

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Jerry Bannon

Wonder Springs

7950 Seward Park Avenue South

Seattle, Washington USA 98118

phone: 206.723.7433

eFax: 425.675.8022

email: bannon@createleaders.org or chronicles@createleaders.org

Please forward prayer requests to: prayer@createleaders.org

Washington State Charity Number: 7529

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the page said I only have 326 words. Not nearly enough, so I will repeat myself. We either color our stuff, or our stuff colors us (345 words). Onward through the color spectrum.

So how do we color our stuff as adults?

First it is appropriate to look at how God created color to begin with. Genesis 1:1,2 states that God (Elohiym) created the stuff of the universe out of nothing in total darkness, for without God presence nothing exists but darkness.

In verse 3 God creates light out of the darkness, but he maintained some darkness to add a contrast to the world. Without getting to line centered, God created what we call the electromagnetic spectrum. That includes not only what we call "light" but radio waves and a whole spectrum of other cool forms of energy that allows our modern information age to function. Using that informative potential, God then begins to reorder the chaos that he deliberately created at the beginning. It's symbolism after all.

Now let us focus on just what we call visible light. That newly created world was quite bland, for it lacked life. Life is what creates color not only in the abstract and the physical, but also in the metaphysical. All the truly vibrant colors in the world are created from life, either directly or indirectly.

Into a world surrounded by an intense blue sky of a protective water vapor canopy, God created man and gave him the job of naming all the colorful animals. Then God made woman from man and color really came into existence. And we won't take that thought any farther.

Even with the entry of sin and death, that pre-flood world was much more vibrant than what we can imagine. There is an old song, "Blues skies." The only line I remember is, "Blue skies smiling at me, nothing but blue skies, do I see." That is the color of the skies we want in all our lives, a pure blue of a life without sin. But with the Genesis flood came the existence of gray skies, as the vapor canopy collapsed and rain and clouds became part of the post flood wilderness.

The gray skies have returned to the wilderness of Seattle. "Gray days, all of them gone, nothing but blue skies from now on." (It's amazing how the human mind can recall song lyrics that you never made any attempt to memorize.) Wishful thinking aside, gray is part of the universe and in Seattle in the winter the gray days can get depressing. For those who have overcome the depression, after a couple of years in the region we continue to suffer from "Puget Paradox Disease" the syndrome of decreased horizons.

To color our gray days, whether in Seattle or elsewhere, we need to color our days with blue, and a whole rainbow of other colors. For if we don't actively color, the gray will paint you. Fellow trekkers of The Order of Wilderness Stuff Trekkers International, this is where all your stuff enters into the equation, and this especially includes your box of crayons. Hallelujah! God, in the beginning designed it that way. Stuff is the mechanism by which we are to add color to our lives.

The problem, most of the time, is not the good stuff, it is the bad stuff we have to contend with. The process of filtering out the bad, and retaining the good stuff is what life is all about. But we are not returning to wishful thinking about blue skies, because sometimes God creates or allows gray skies, and even night to come into our lives. Again by His design.

This darkness can appear even if it is in the middle of the summer of nothing but blue skies. Darkness is a time for rest and renewing, sleep if you will. Night, natural or created, is not the time to roam the streets, either in the city or in your mind. All kinds of evil is present in those late hours, and to overcome the evil of darkness, our focus must be to rest through it, knowing that God has promised a sunrise.

Perhaps the most uplifting time in life is to view the sunrise. But if we try to party through the night, we might see the sunrise, but we surely will miss out on its grandeur. In the sunrise we go from darkness to full color in just a short period of time. It happens every day, but again most of us are either asleep, or too hung over to experience it. Just like making time to go fishing, we should make time to view the sunrise. But even on cloudy mornings there is a reason to rise early.

Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." Lamentations 3:22-24 (NIV)

Notice the “I say to myself,” in the NKJV it reads, “says my soul.” In the Nearly Inspired Version it is a conscious choice, in the version that the Apostle Paul used in his latter ministry, it is a subconscious rendering. Both are probably the truth, times, training, obedience, and environmental factors enter into our understanding of the LORD’s faithful compassions. But if we don’t start until afternoon we forfeit the morning blessings.

God’s faithfulness and His compassions are good stuff. It is just that I have a difficult time holding on to stuff I can’t touch, see, or at times when I really need them, feel. These attributes of universal truth are part of what Christian orthodoxy calls the “Adoption as Children of God.” So why don’t we just create (color) something real from our natural world as our “Adoption Papers?” Since adoption requires a somewhat mature understanding of legal proceedings, probably a more simplified church rendering would be “Standing on God’s Promises.”

Fellow shirt wearing members of The Order of Wilderness Stuff Trekkers International, I know it sounds childish, but there are times when we need a warm fuzzy, or maybe a Teddy Bear, or a coloring book, to remind us of who God is, and who we are in Jesus. Because when we need that reminder the most, we are being quite childish, or if you prefer and are currently feeling well, childlike.

Now, whatever this reminder might be, it has to be a “item” of very personal stuff, colored especially just for you. It might be a personal item that your mother saved, or something of importance to your hidden nature, but the most important thing about this piece of stuff, is that it should be of little or no value to anyone but you. Therefore, it might be some cool thing you found in the thrift store, or other place. It has to be cheap, because if it has much worldly value you may begin to idolize it, or as I mentioned last week make it an object of Gnostic Materialism.

Something along that line occurred when I turned 21. One of the rites of passage for being a man is going into the liquor store and buying for yourself a bottle of booze. In my particular case, it took some months to work up the nerve, you know coloring by outlining the lines first. Anyway, we had a friend who was getting married and we were going to throw a bachelors party for him at his apartment. Being cheap, poor, college students, a forgotten friend of mine and I decided to share a fifth of whiskey.

Not knowing anything about whiskey and it being close to the Christmas season, I entered the liquor store and selected the one in the prettiest seasonal decanter, for a price that I could afford, Calvert, Smooth Canadian Whiskey. Armed with this bottle and other libations, the whole crew descended on the bachelors apartment with gusto. I remember after about forty five minutes later, my booze buddy and I remarked that we thought a shared fifth of whiskey should last a whole night, not less than an hour. I also remember being dragged somewhere around the Browne’s Addition area of Spokane on a cold December night.

More importantly, I remembered just how bad a hang over can make you feel the next morning. Thereafter, vowing to stay within the lines of my coloring book, I filled the decanter with mouth wash, to remind me just how easy it is to become a drunken bum. Now every morning for the rest of my college days I was reminded, by using my mouth wash, to always color inside the lines.

Now this would be nice, but wait till you hear the rest of the story. At that time I was using some pretty blue mouth wash. After I graduated from college and getting ready to go into the service, I took the almost full blue bottle home to my mother. She, being a person who liked the color blue, placed the bottle as a decoration on the back of the toilet, just like I had done in college. I don’t know if she knew the pretty blue liquid was mouth wash or not, but I know she never knew the whole story about why I kept the pretty blue decanter.

When my mother died, that blue decanter was still sitting on the ledge over the toilet in her house. Every time I entered her bathroom I was reminded of my foolish journey down a dead end road that night. I understand that decanter and the blue liquid is in a box somewhere I still have to sort through. When I find it I will replace the blue stuff for some of that awful tasting Listerine, the brown stuff that looks like whiskey and probably tastes worse, so that I can again use it every day, the mouth wash not the whiskey, and be reminded of my own poor choice of colors.

We all struggle with stuff. Some of it material, some of it of a more spiritual nature. Thankfully, I have not had to struggle with a lot of stuff that many people have had to struggle with. But the point is this, that blue bottle of mouth wash never saved me from anything, but it did serve (and hopefully will serve me again) to understand the grace of God and in a very limited way how I am responsible for much of the color and the stuff in my life.

I need to be reminded of God's grace in a real and tangible way every day. That real and tangible way is working with stuff. It is stuff that makes each of us a uniquely colorful personality. The problem is not the stuff, it is that stuff becomes the priority. Let's close with another blue sky analogy.

Blue sky is really caused by water vapor in the air. If there is sufficient water vapor and conditions are right, beautiful white clouds form, and make a wonderful day even more refreshing. But as the weather system continues to build, the water droplets, instead of making the clouds white, now because of their density, block the passage of light and the clouds become gray. Stuff, with too much density, each day of our life can change a great day into a miserable storm.

As an adopted son or daughter of God we may not be able to change the weather, but we can, and are given the opportunity to prepare for it. To get a red rain slicker for instance. We can go out into the storm in a cotton T shirt and it may cost us our life, or we can get a gray overcoat and gloves and complain bitterly about the weather.

These are all the choices we make, and the drabness of our lives is the price we pay for not seeking God's colors. God gave us a world of color in a world of stuff, to choose not to participate, or only participate on our terms, and our lives will be drab because of that choice. More importantly, as suffers of Puget Paradox Disease, when the rainy grayness disappears, we seek to buy sun glasses instead of enjoying the vistas of God's creation. What Sun glasses have you purchased lately?

Seeds for Prayer

I still have a house full of junk, that needs to be cleaned out, and fixed up in Eastern Washington, plus a lake cabin filled with most of my mom's important treasures, and a basement here, full of stuff also. But it has been my conscious choice these last few weeks to focus on the vistas the Lord has given me at this time. That means the stuff has not gone away, but I have gained a perspective on how the stuff can and must be dealt with. God created color, we perceive grayness, because stuff gets in the way. Stuff blocks the Son. Please intercede for these gray dissolving opportunities, and the grace to rest in the vision of the vistas ahead. This concerns not only the stuff stuff, but the opportunity to make this written stuff more valuable, both temporal and spiritual. To that end I have begun to work off the theme "Color Your Wilderness."