

Chronicles of Diversity

Your leadership weekly



Palmer Lake in the sun

Fractured Rapture Tales

30,000 pounds of bananas

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Tale 15 30,000 pounds of bananas

Thirty thousand pounds of bananas?

Perhaps you have never heard of this song by the late Harry Chapin. It tells about a wreck of a truckload of bananas heading into Scranton, Pennsylvania. Harry's most famous song is "Cat's in the Cradle," but I am most fond of "Dance Band on the Titanic," which one could say (me) is a great metaphor for the Christian life. Searching through his songs on the itunes Music Store, I also ran across "On the Road to Kingdom Come," which I may check out at a later date.

In case you are wondering about my 30,000 pounds of bananas, it relates to an event that took place on my drive back to Seattle on Good Friday, from my place up in Northeastern Washington. But more importantly it shows that music, and that includes all that I would call music, but generically would contain most music, is the fruit of all of God's gifts to the world and to His Children. Put in another way, it is our best glimpse of eternity in what we generally call heaven. Music is the foretaste of heaven here on earth.

I went to sleep early Thursday evening, even before dark. I had slept very little the previous couple of nights. Some of it was because of life, some of it dealt with my trip to the north country. In any event I was extremely tired so I nodded off hoping for a better new day.

The morning sunrise was my wake up call for the Feast of God's grace, more popularly known as Good Friday. My first thoughts and prayers had to do, with how I should begin this week's message. I knew I wanted to write about the continuum of music from the temporal to the eternal and from the

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secular to the sacred. Since no inspiration came to mind, and knowing I had a few days left, I figured God would provide, as He now has.

I also spent a little time thinking about my trip back to Seattle. It was going to be a long day. The first part of that trip would be mostly on roads that I had never traveled before. The goal was to see if this journey might show me a reason to move to this area, to give up the ease of city life to plant myself in the most remote area of Washington, with little known opportunity to make a living to which I was accustomed. To most, the land would be considered “God forsaken,” but was it really just “man forsaken?” Is it a land where man can not play God, therefore we want nothing to do with it?

The real concern however, was the main reason for coming north out of Spokane. That was to talk with my neighbor, who had recently sold his house in Colville, to move up to the creek and build a home where his small cabin now stood.

One of the few things I accomplished last summer was to understand more fully these property descriptions. What I had learned was there was absolutely no way that the properties were laid out as we all hand allowed to exist for some years. I was going to have to tell this friend that his small lot he bought from the other neighbor a few years ago, and on which he build his small cabin, was my land, from the beginning, and a new survey would more than likely prove it beyond a doubt.

Then the difficult would become impossible, I would have to convince him that I wasn’t going to take that land back, or make him pay for it. I only wanted to get everything cleared up, so that from the survey forward, there would be no dispute on where everything was. Not only is his area not the important part of my property, but his presence had provided protection from vandals and other people who had begun to be a significant problem before he bought his place.

As I sat and listened to the conversation, I began to understand that neither he or my other neighbor lived with a concept of grace that I all to often take for granted. We talked also a great deal about death.

The first neighbor is an old man, even though he is not that old naturally. But I learned that over the last ten months all of his remaining natural family had died, he was the only one left. Paige is one of those people who has started many conversations with. “When people meet me they don’t like me, and after they get to know me, they hate my guts.” There is a significant amount of truth in his statement.

It is always been my perspective that his self serving interests, are not worth the expense and hassle. But now he will be confronted with some of those assumptions of his earlier years, were not based on communication, but rather on his self serving attitude. The question with Paige remains, in his last period of time on this earth, can he accept grace and repent from that attitude of always needing to be right at the expense of others.

Rich was in the University of Washington Hospital the same week I was there. He received a bone marrow transplant. Expense wise, even with insurance, my operation compares to his and subsequent treatments as like a root canal to my cardiac surgery. His attitude and medical expenses are such that I believe that all he will be doing for some time is just enjoying the country and not working toward any big dreams of the future.

As we talked in these terms of death and dying, I was struck by the weight of death that most people carry. In my recent experiences, I would venture to say that weight is just as prevalent amongst evangelical Christians as anyone else. On Good Friday, I am talking to a man about the final curtain of this life, and I am rejoicing in the Grace of God, that I have been to death’s door, and got the scar to prove it. Not only that, I am thinking about my plans for this place thirty years into the future. What a wonderful God we serve!

I left for Seattle doing my best to explain law and gospel to people who really don’t have a concept of unmerited grace, even in a common way. The point of choice needs to be emphasized, as well as perhaps the need to repent for past ways. Please pray for this situation.

Once my conversation with Rich was over, I headed out for the northern route to Seattle. From Curlew, my trip would take me to Bodie, to Chesaw, to Molson (yes, after the Canadian brewery family), and to Oroville. From there I would again look at the church and ministry opportunities in town as well as another trip to Nighthawk, and Palmer Lake, to Loomis and this time clear down to Conconully before getting back to the main highway at Okanogan.

From those back country roads, I was left with the impression of Psalm 19. In the region I traveled, really what our culture would call a wilderness desert, the speech of creation was overwhelming. You didn't need to hike back many miles, you could just drive to a spot, pitch a tent or something similar, and during the week you might not see another human being. Somebody may drive by and wave or stop and talk about the country, but it was a land that moves at the pace of a different drummer. That drummer is not the culture of man, but the eternity of God.

To modern culture and to our California Christianity, of "Oh, God should I buy the Lexus, or the Beamer?" this could be a terrifying prospect. Actually, the concept goes well beyond California to encompass all of western culture. Old pickups are at home here, this is not the land of luxury SUVs.

Creation sings praises and speaks of the glory of God. What a lame excuse it will be when you get to heaven's gate and say, "I only know the religion of the city, and what I get on mp3's and DVD's. You mean to say that 'The Dance Band on the Titanic' wasn't just about the ship."

Mining and homesteading was what brought a brief period of prosperity to this country a hundred years ago. It has been down hill ever since, at least in the terms of economic prosperity. I always wondered how my great grandfather was able to get a mountain named after him when he homesteaded in the area 100 years ago. On this trip I learned that the area was not opened to homesteading until 1900, and mining in 1890. Before this, from 1872, this area was part of the vast Colville Indian Reservation.

The future of ministry in this area relies on God providing liquidity (financial capital) from more prosperous regions, that California Christianity for example. This never has worked before because, modern ministry is almost always defined in terms of abundance. of things and spiritual gifts, not in terms of grace and faith in the desert wilderness. From the abundance of stuff, discontent is an artesian well. But from a desert wilderness, a dependable spring is worth more than gold.

The true abundant life flows out of the desert of the human soul, in a channel we call the heart. Given by the grace of God through faith, that heart spring is developed into the fruit of the Spirit. The Bible says in Galatians 5 that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

The proper context for this is the fruit of the Spirit is love, all the rest are modifiers or manifestations of love that flow through the grateful heart. Again these manifestations show themselves in their highest form in music, or the language of eternity. This spring flows both in the secular desert and in the religious desert. Sometimes the essence of grace is shown more forcefully in a secular context because of the contrast. This brings us to 30,000 pounds of bananas.

About two miles out of East Wenatchee we were traveling at the speed limit. Ahead of me was a pickup and a dump truck with a pony fully loaded with gravel. As I was to learn more clearly later, this dump truck was not a little one, but one with the extra wheels, the whole rig probably licensed for 105,500 pounds.

Me and the pickup were quite a ways back from the truck, for there was no way or reason to pass this sizable mass of 5/8 minus. Suddenly to my amazement somebody in an older motor home pulled right out in front of this truck. The whole concept of the song ran quickly through my mind, and continued because of the smell of burning brakes for another mile until the dump truck turned onto a side road.

The motor home driver, probably completely oblivious to the fact of the miracle that had just happened to save his life, continued down to the bridge across the Columbia at 45 miles per hour. As I passed this guy on the bridge, I honked my horn, and I didn't use any obscene gestures. I just wanted to remind the guy, that while God's grace may be a free gift, it is because this is grace too costly for this world, and I'm one of those costly grace kind of guys.

This motor home had bicycles on both the front and rear, so I assume this man had his family with him. At times I wonder just how stupid man is. I'm sure the guy blew me off, but some day, when he stands before Jesus and says, "God, when did you ever do something for me? Jesus can take him back to that point and say, by My grace alone, you and your family did not die on that Good Friday.

In "30,000 Pounds of Bananas," the lyric says of the soon to be dead truck driver:
He said "Christ!"
It was funny how he had named the only man who could save him now.

I'm 100 percent sure the driver of that dump truck uttered such a prayer on Good Friday and that prayer in this context was answered. The smell of burning brakes also gave testimony. It is human nature to pray those type of prayers in life and death situations. I would say that even if St. Christopher was driving the dump truck he would have offered up a similar prayer, and probably gone on to say that there is no reason to pray to saints for deliverance. Where the rubber really meets the road, only Jesus Christ can save.

So instead of 30,000 pounds of bananas, or 40 tons of crushed gravel scattered along a quarter mile of highway, mixed up with a few heads, and arms, broken glass, and twisted metal, by the grace of God there was nothing.

Secular music can give us an insight into the reality of eternity. But a real understanding of eternity in the present can be conveyed most effectively in God centered music and hymns. It is truly too bad that much of modern Christian music is not good sacred music, it is even a poor example of good secular music. One modern example however on how timeless God centered music can be, is found in "In Christ Alone" by Keith Getty and Stuart Townsend:

In Christ Alone

*In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand*

*In Christ alone, who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
'Til on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live*

*There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ*

*No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till he returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand*

“Here in the death of Christ I live” is the line that I find impossible to get out of my mind. As the world has celebrated the Resurrection on the Sunday past, take some time to contemplate the power of these few words.

Seeds for Prayer

The trip convinced me that someday there is a path to this wilderness desert and it will provide a Psalm 19 type of experience to all that I can attract to help out with the ministry, even for short periods of time. The place on Palmer Lake is still available and as soon as God may open the doors, I will return to see if we can make arrangements to purchase the property. This trip also confirmed that there is also a wealth of other properties from which to build a church and ministry. There is also a tremendous opportunity to develop video and other teaching resources, which I think now will provide the financial footing required.