



Chronicles of Diversity

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Contact

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The fields

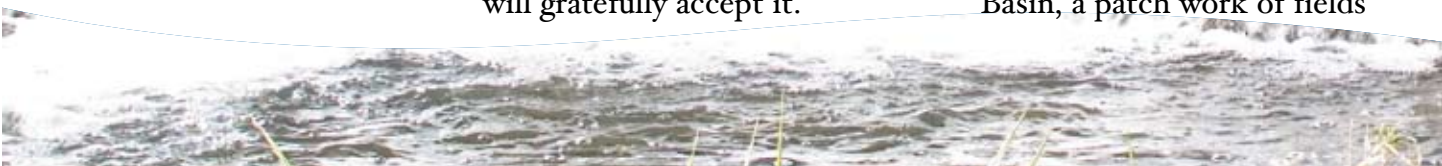
*John 4:34-38 Jesus said to them,
“My food is to do the will of Him
who sent Me, and to finish His work.
Do you not say, “There are still four
months and then comes the harvest?”
Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes
and look at the fields, for they are
already white for harvest! And he
who reaps receives wages, and gathers
fruit for eternal life, that both he who
sows and he who reaps may rejoice
together. For in this the saying is true:
“One sows and another reaps.’ I sent
you to reap that for which you have
not labored; others have labored, and
you have entered into their labors.”*

This passage in the book of John follows Jesus' discourse with the woman at the well, as he speaks to his disciples about the work of evangelism. In our part of the church age, all or portions of this section of scripture are used for support, either financially or prayerfully of missions activities. Not to break with that evangelical liturgy, if you would like to send me lots of money or offer hours of prayer, I will gratefully accept it.

However, my main purpose for using this passage is not to directly look at the harvest, but to look at the fields. In our modern urbanized culture, the fields are something you pass through on the Interstate in air conditioned comfort, on our way to and from the big city.

Last Saturday, I passed through the harvest at Ritzville about 60 miles west of Spokane on my way back to Seattle. If things worked out as planned, that same day my cousin Jim would have finished harvest in Wilbur about the same distance from Spokane on US 2. Over the next few weeks the wheat harvest in the Inland Empire, as that region of Eastern Washington is called, will slowly proceed eastward, cumulating in the Palouse region near Pullman, and Washington State University about the middle of September.

From your vehicle you will notice, before you get to the irrigated lands of the Columbia Basin, a patch work of fields



planted or lying in summer fallow. It is not that the farmers were too lazy to plant half their ground, it is that there is not enough rainfall in this region to support growing of wheat on an annual basis. So they let half the land rest every year to allow enough residual moisture to accumulate so that a profitable harvest is taken every other year.

While most of the wheat grown in Eastern Washington is winter wheat, meaning it is planted in the fall and produces grain the next summer, much of the land is planted in spring grains, including certain varieties of wheat, barley, and other cereals. This spring, because of the dry winter, there was a big debate among farmers whether to plant any spring grain at all. Those who did, were gifted with a relatively wet spring and are now receiving a reward for their step of faith. It is only in harvest time that rain is not welcome in the wheat lands of Eastern Washington.

As we move from the natural fields to the spiritual fields that Jesus is referring to in the section, the role of water in producing a harvest must not be overlooked. The preacher will rightfully point to this liquidity in the fields of the mind as being a manifestation of God's Holy Spirit working in the individual to bring about the harvest of souls. While this specific revelation is true, what most preachers don't see is that this working of the Holy Spirit is first and foremost manifest in common grace in all humanity. By just limiting this grace to the specific application of personal salvation, most preachers miss a great faith teaching tool.

Since we last got together, a couple of things have taken place in the athletic fields, that directly relate to the fertility of the fields of our minds.

When you talk of fields, athletics, and the mind, of course many of us think of the movie, "A Field of Dreams," where a corn field is transformed into a baseball diamond in which the great players of history return from the dead to play the game. "If you build it they will come." This line from the movie has become part of our modern culture. But the movie does somewhat represent common faith in application even if it is fictional faith.

But back to the real athletic fields. The first field I want to point you to is Lance Armstrong winning his seventh Tour de France. Some of the comments that I have heard suggest that he may be the greatest athlete of all time in any sport. Other thoughts spoke of his monetary potential in endorsement contracts. Much of those discussions concerned what the commentators called "Lance's edge." That being inferred that Lance many times says what he believes, rather than what sponsors and others might want to hear, or think they want to hear.

The other athletic situation I would like to discuss also has a French connection. Big news in Eastern Washington and decreasing from its center at Gonzaga University in Spokane was the diagnosis of Ronny Turiaf, their all star basketball forward with an enlarged aorta and heart valve problem. Ronny came to Gonzaga from Martinique, via Paris, France and was the second round pick of the Los Angeles Lakers in the recent NBA draft.

Ronny's diagnosis is the same problem that took me into the operating room at the University of Washington two and a half years ago. Ronny is now back in Spokane beginning his rehabilitation following successful surgery at Stanford's Medical Center.

The preponderance of questions concerning Ronny's surgery wonder if Ronny will physically be able to play professional basketball for the Lakers. To me, providing the surgery went as well as reported is a completely absurd question. Of course he can physically play at that level, maybe even significantly better than he could before his ordeal. The question I have, does he have the psychological desire to play for the Lakers, or is there another field of dreams court where Ronny has now been drafted to play the rest of his life upon?

It is my contention that Lance Armstrong would have never won the Tour seven times without the edge he gained with his struggle with cancer. In Lance's run however, the Tour served as a mechanism to play in a much bigger race, this is the race for why you were created and why you are still alive.

Ronny's surgery moved him to that venue also, whether he understands that now or not. My question is whether playing for the Los Angeles Lakers, or even winning an NBA championship will fulfill that quest for life.

It's a relatively small club of those of us who, should or could have been dead now, but for the grace of God we have been spared for the field beyond our dreams. Since I know much more about basketball than bike racing I will attempt to bring that into context.

I never was able for circumstances beyond my control to play basketball at the level that I believe I could or others have told me over the years that I could have played. The whole story would take more space than we have room and truly serves only limited use even to my own promotion. I also thought I could have become a successful basketball coach at a relatively high level. Only since my surgery, have I come to realize, that had any of these dreams come true, I would have been dead now. Even in this era of wonderful medicine most of the time, conditions such as those of Ronny and I, are diagnosed only in an autopsy.

To further emphasize this difference of this real field beyond your dreams, I would also like to add a few words about the future of Kayla Burt, the UW woman's basketball player whose heart stopped on New Years Eve two and a half years ago.

Before the episode I was discussing Kayla's demeanor with one of her closest friends. In that conversation I mentioned that one of the things I knew about Kayla is no matter what happened in her life, she would always get back to her feet and carry on. After watching Kayla play her freshman year and after her heart stoppage I agreed with Mike Daugherty, Husky Associate Head Coach, that Kayla could have been the best woman's Husky ever.

That will not be the case now however, during her announcement about returning to play her junior and senior years, Kayla spoke of finishing something she had started. While Kayla did lead the Huskies in scoring this last season, the fire that she possessed in that first year was missing. Kayla has been drafted into a much larger arena than the 94 foot long floor on the east side of the Montlake campus.

The problem is how to take those talents and gifts and use them for not just your own glory, but for why you are created. When I see

Kayla in church and elsewhere it is apparent that she still has that competitive edge, I spoke about in Lance Armstrong, it is just that her focus is different or deeper than it used to be, and still somewhat undefined as God develops His plan for her life.

Basketball is the ultimate teams sport, but like cycling it is still made up of individuals with various skills and gifts. As you advance up through the various levels of competition the physical ability differences between players diminish, therefore the mental or psychological differences must increase. Winners are determined by their mental and psychological abilities more than their more natural giftings.

My contention is the difference between players in Division I college basketball, men and women, is about 10 physical and 90 psychological. If you kick that up to the NBA that difference is probably more like 1 physical and 99 psychological.

What this means for Ronny is after this operation, his 1 physical difference between him and the best other NBA players will probably decrease. But until Ronny knows for a fact that the field of dreams he had before his surgery NBA basketball is part of that bigger arena he is now called to play in, he will not be able, just like in Kayla's case, to bring the mental concentration required to succeed at the level of their previous dream, because the bar has been significantly raised. It is not so much you now, it is more the why, and what do I do to get the greatest blessing for others in the time I have left, whether that be a week or 70 years. God has asked you to play the rest of your life completely beyond your most lofty dream. But how does that truly play out?

Now I am developing a coaching theory concerning this psychological ability based solely on empirical evidence from my own competitive athletic life. Before I get to that however, I need to set a context. In college Dr. Stevens my professor in Organic Chemistry used to tell the story about a colleague that through his study of the chemistry of the human body had come to the conclusion that the true difference between men and women was one hydroxyl group. At which time Dr. Stevens would pull out his pipe, move to the window, after gazing there for a long period, would turn to the class and announce, "I think he has spent too much

time in the laboratory.”

My similar conclusion is the difference between Lance Armstrong, before and after his cancer, is based upon his ability to control his adrenaline production. Succinctly, you can't be a seven time winner of the Tour de France unless you can summon the proper amount of adrenaline at the proper time to move beyond that minor physical difference in Tour riders. In other words, because of the discipline Lance developed through his cancer experience, within the Tour, at brief times, he truly can function at closer to 100 human efficiency physically and mentally than perhaps any other athlete in history.

As soon as I was diagnosed with my aortic problem, the doctors put me on what they call beta blockers. These powerful drugs basically control the production of adrenaline in the body on the beta sites on your neurons, keeping your blood pressure and heart rate in check so that you don't pop an artery. I was on these drugs for over a year after my surgery.

What this means is you physically can override the effects of the drugs, but you must do it physically. The illustration I most often use is that you need to run a couple of flights of stairs and then you can do anything, like you used to be able to do. The problem is that you need a reason to run up a couple of flights of stairs and most of life does not make such demands.

You can't play NBA basketball on beta blockers. You need the drug during your healing process to keep you from stressing something before it is completely healed. The other situation concerning this surgery is that your physical stamina has to be redeveloped from nothing. For example, my first training run of the spring season before my surgery was to slowly jog four miles. After my surgery it was more of an effort to walk a half a block.

The Tour means that you have to be at the top of your form for the month of July and put on your game face for twenty one rides covering somewhat over 2000 miles. The NBA season consists of 82 games, plus preseason exhibitions and if your team is good enough to go far into

the playoffs. In short professional basketball is the most physically grueling sport that man ever created. You have to want it really bad to continue to compete at that level.

So the question facing Ronny Turiaf. is the NBA the forum that God spared his life to perform even for a short time? Only Ronny can answer that question. But I do know this from my experience, God has replaced my basketball dreams with an opportunity to do something which I can only just begin in this life, and I have eternity to fulfill. Even now my words effect or affect more people, through out the world, each week than I could ever hope to touch directly from being a successful basketball coach, and we really haven't started yet.

I've just begun to look at this adrenaline connection, but in the complexity of God's creation of our human body, perhaps it is the chemical that produces faith. Faith is the means by which miracles are brought into reality. God's part is easy for Him, but to get us to the point where we will be willing to take significant risks takes more than wishful thinking to develop the fertile fields of our minds. Perhaps adrenaline is the fertilizer of faith, that makes our field beyond our dreams the only truly fruitful enterprise.

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