



The Wonder Springs Chronicle

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Common graciousness

Last week we wrote about the now generally accepted notion of the American Dream, namely home ownership and it's pending demise. So how are you going to keep them down on the farm, or in this case in the suburbs and the townhouses, if they can't afford to buy the place?

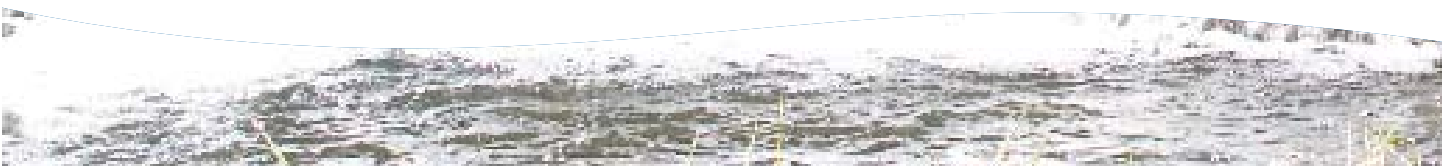
Of course one of the options is stated in the question's preface, they could move down on the farm, but that assumes that rural housing values are commensurately less expensive than their urban and suburban alternatives. When you consider job and income disparities between the two locales. Common sense dictates that cheaper home values reflect lower economic realities, at least if real estate is a market driven enterprise, with or without government incentives.

However, I have noticed recently that in the excessive drive to own you own piece of the American Dream in real

property, something much more important may have been scuttled in this attempt for continual wealth appreciation. That factor, for lack of a better word, is the loss of America's common graciousness.

I write extensively here at Wonder Springs about the reality of natural law and common grace. What I have failed to realize is that when you take common grace and humanize it, what flows out is common graciousness. Common graciousness is beautiful, pretty much beyond description.

In contrast, getting mine at the expense of others is just ugly. Getting mine by empowering others is a start, but true common graciousness means my reward comes from you realizing that there is more to your life than just material possessions, stuff, and junk. True wealth begins when you believe more in others than they can presently realize.



America, last week elected a black President, a true Afro American. Conservative pundits and news commentators are still trying to figure out how John McCain was able to lose by six percentage points. The underlying reality is that the Obama campaign was about six percentage points more commonly gracious than the McCain candidacy.

What you basically saw from McCain was a grumpy old man, telling you like it is, and how he could help you maintain that status quo. Following the election, anonymous McCain sources began smearing the Republican Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin, as dumb and stupid. This only verifies the Obama gracious margin of victory. The fact that McCain has seemingly done nothing about these leaks, seems to attest that he lost for more than a few good reasons.

George W. Bush ran for President as a compassionate conservative. While not being quite the same as commonly gracious, it is sort of in the same universe. Furthermore if one would choose a commonly gracious First Lady from history, Laura Bush could fill that role. The only one coming close would be Betty Ford, but most of her graciousness became apparent after Jerry was no longer President. Likewise we also learned Jerry was a really decent guy.

In my recollection of history, of all the Presidents I can remember, every time it seems that the generally more gracious person was elected, except perhaps for Richard Nixon. As in the case of both Bush II and Jimmy Carter their failings stemmed mainly from not discerning the reality of non gracious Presidential advisors.

So just what is common graciousness?

Since this is a Biblical Creation website and blog, we define two types of Law and Grace. They are specific, as outlined in the Bible, and common or natural, as recognizable within all human society, both those barbaric and civilized.

The goodness that every human advocates, stems from either common or specific grace. The infusion of God's image into humanity is what separates mankind from the animal species. That does not mean that the animal species do

not practice graciousness, it is however part of the veiled outward working of the goodness of God, not by some conscious moral decision by the individual animal.

Historically mankind has been scared of the big bad wolf, basically because the wolf social structure is as complex as human communities, and many times much more harmonious. Wolves were bred into dumb downed dogs, eventually becoming completely helpless, stupid, but cute. An ideal best friend for the masses.

When faced with the reality of truth, humans have three alternatives. One is to seek more information, the second is to embrace that truth and adjust your life to that new reality, and the third is to flee from that truth many times in hostility and belligerence.

"Say it ain't true Joe!" worked its way out through the McCain campaign, from a woman Governor from all places, wild remote Alaska. Not only was Mrs. Palin a Christian, she went to one of those tongue talking, Pentecostal churches all the time. How more distant a worldview from the establishment Republican mindset could one human being be? That poisonous venom, from the sanctimonious right, not just the progressive left, is seeking to destroy all common goodness that remains in the world.

Contrary to evolutionary theology, men and women have distinctly different personalities. Common graciousness comes more natural to women than to men. I try to exhibit common graciousness in my writing, but any of that comes through, is a learned and a learning behavior. I am much more comfortable battling Don Quixote windmills than I am at listening to the nuances of expression. We were created male and female for a purpose, well beyond just reproductive rights and responsibilities. However in a moral society our human differences reinforce and strengthen the wider community and civil society as a whole.

Common grace in the world is as common as elemental carbon. Carbon is fixed with other elements in unique ways in all life and humanity; just as is common grace, but only with the context of life does common grace have the potential to become graciousness.

We hear that greenhouse gasses are to be the pending cause of human suffering in the world. However this worldview fails to realize that carbon based greenhouse gases, are insignificant to global climates. Water vapor is far and away the most pronounced climatological variable in the world. We might think we can manipulate “liquidity” for the good of society in our economic models, but to think we can control climate by removing human dependence upon fossil fuels is inane and insane.

The vision to change to renewable forms of energy is a wise goal, but the mass balance of fossil fuel energy needed to create and maintain any current or future civil infrastructure, is completely dependent upon the fixed carbon nature of at one time greenhouse gases.

The most common and relevant of those stored fixed sources of carbon is coal. At least the most relevant of those living fixed sources of carbon is the human being. If you take away the fixed carbon in a human, you are left with a lump of clay, but ashes to ashes, means that the carbon is in some sense released to the world, to be fixed again into some other life form.

A diamond is essentially a carbon coal crystal, but in reality we view a diamond as the supreme gem of crystals. Much of that is marketing hype and social mores, but that has been the historic reality of human culture along with gold. You combine gold and a diamond or diamonds and you have a visual representation of marriage in the United States. That would be true in the rest of the world also, except they generally don't possess the wealth, or the cultural hype, needed to purchase the crystal gem.

The diamond is also the hardest substance known to man. We use small manmade diamonds to polish all other substances. Staying with our male and female human illustration earlier, those diamond crystal gems are what make and maintain the male human as a somewhat positive influence in society.

Therefore, if the analogy of common grace is as common as elemental carbon is truth, it follows that there are too few commonly gracious human crystal gem diamonds to provide the needed tension in human culture. Or put it

in a much more succinct version, the good diamonds are pretty much spoken for, by both the specific and common grace of God. In the wolf analogy, solitary alpha females are as rare as solitary alpha males.

Common graciousness should be the operational standard for all human civilization, but especially recently that seems not to be true. What's up?

There is increasing evidence that Christianity in America is faltering. This is not new, before the rise of American evangelicalism; Protestant liberalism suffered the same fate. We could trace a similar path throughout all of church history and back through the Old Testament to the beginning of time. That Old Testament tradition falls exclusively on the Jewish people, by the grace of the Almighty, who chose this very small tribe or nation, to be His special people.

As any good preacher of the Christian good news will point out, Judaism is a very complex Torah of works righteousness, in which humanity seeks the grace of God through keeping God's law. A Protestant preacher will say much the same of Roman Catholicism. This closing then states, “We have no creed but Christ as the human Messiah and hence need nothing else.”

What evangelicalism forgets to tell you, instead of the Jewish Torah, or Roman Catholic, or Orthodox traditions, evangelicalism has it's own set of laws based upon the collective wisdom of the evangelical fathers of less than two hundred years. Praise the Lord; a few of them are still alive, as founders of the Jesus Movement in the late 60s and 70s. By these laws and these laws alone we are going to convert the whole world into our vision of the heavenly Jerusalem. For you to be part of that group, just ask Jesus into your heart, and anxiously wait for the Rapture to take you to heaven.

Missing essentials of this systematic theology are history, theology, and substance. If evangelicalism perishes as it is now configured, the results may not be all that bad. The world's current economic stress will surely test, in the words of H. Richard Niebuhr writing about Protestant liberalism : *A God without wrath, brought men without sin, into a Kingdom without judgment, through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross.*

In 2005 Christian Pollster George Barna published a book "Revolution" describing how revolutionary Christians are seeking to change essentially the evangelical church from without, because the church was not ascribing to what they deemed important Christian principles.

Last year, Willow Creek Church published a report from their own resources that stated the most committed among their related congregations were disenchanted with their Willow Creek church experience. Willow Creek for its contribution, changed tactics to more fully embrace what is known as the emergent church movement, which is the latest evangelical evolution of Niebuhr's statement. As far as the discouraged, they were told to become "self feeders" so they could continue to grow in the Christian faith.

Just recently Julia Duin, religion columnist for the Washington Times, published a book, "Quitting Church: Why the Faithful are Fleeing and What to do About it." The essence of that book is a further elaboration on the disintegration of America's church structure. There are continuing articles on the Internet and in print about the demise of the religious right and other Christian movements in America.

More reformational organizations point out that you truly cannot have a church without a church. They however seem completely disconnected from the fact that, try as hard as they might, the "Faithful" are unable to find a true church within the historically standardized definitions of Christianity in their local community. These institutions seem to follow a theistic evolutionary laissez faire church growth model, quite unrelated to the zealous spiritual drive of their Protestant Reformation roots.

In the historic context of the church, Communion, the Lord's Supper, and the Eucharist are much more significant than soda crackers and concord grape juice, offered occasionally, or at some time that does not interfere with real church work. Perhaps with minimal training of God's fertile soil of disillusioned Christians, a miracle of ex nihilo church planting could begin.

In case you might misinterpret, a true church is a place where: A loving but Holy, jealous God,

brings destitute sinners, by legal adoption into a redeemed and justified Kingdom, through the ministrations of a Christ sacrificed on a Cross and resurrected from death.

In Matthew 16:18b Jesus states that on the above confession He "*will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.*"

So what seems to be amiss in the current state of the church, is that we all are suffering from the curse, or lack of faith in God. As represented in evangelicalism, churches have become Ichabod's cathedral, the glory has departed. To understand that we must look to the specific revelation of the Bible to not only gain the context for God's grace in the church, but His common graciousness in creation and human culture. That is found in Luke 4:16 27:

So He Jesus came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

*"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,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."*

Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, "Is this not Joseph's son?"

He said to them, "You will surely say this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country.' " Then He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and

six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.”

As these current stupendous economic and other changes take place in the world, don't look to the established church for miracles, at least not the evangelical church. The miracles will be wrought through sources that established religion cannot comprehend. Those sources may be knowledgeable of both the specific grace revelation of the Bible and the common grace revelation in creation, but it will not come in miraculous specific revelation without the extension of common graciousness to all humanity.

A lump of coal is recreated into a crystal gem by tremendous heat and pressure. Through that stress imperfections in quality are also removed. Common graciousness is created in a human being not so much through these overt stresses but by living the life of faith. Hence the Sidon widow above, maybe a young Jewish woman, or what many today would consider an eco squeak with the transcendental knowledge of God obtained by direct observation in the wild. Such were Sarah, Ester, and Jesus' mother Mary, to name three.

The leper could come from Roman Catholicism, transcendently through the preservation of wildness, or a calling any means God and His sovereign election may choose. Chances are that the disease will not be leprosy, a disease that is cured today by medicine, but probably more debilitating religious affliction of not conforming to evangelical standards, such as the revolutionary of Barna, the self feeder from Willow Creek, or the Fleeing Faithful church Quitter of Duin.

The graciousness of God is such that the group will contain all of the above, and many more, for such is the kingdom of heaven. The self righteous don't need a Messiah, for they attempt to save themselves.

The following parables of the kingdom of heaven show that God creates diamonds out of coal, very common carbon. Those diamonds become more valuable than worldly stuff, for which the world commonly seeks: These parables are from Matthew 13:44 52:

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

Jesus said to them, “Have you understood all these things?”

They said to Him, “Yes, Lord.”

Then He said to them, “Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.”

Those “treasure things new and old” are most valuable in the context of common graciousness. In that context this eternal reality will change the world we now know.

This is a brief attempt to illustrate one of the most rare of all human virtues. Words cannot really convey the essence of common graciousness. Alike with a mountain vista, a sunset over a sea or lake, the very created nature of the graciousness' beauty is a wonder to behold. In this modern world we wonder about a lot, because we really never take the time to contemplate the real wonder and the beauty we are here at all. Graciousness is really an outworking of inner peace. So we close with the blessing of peace, in any specific language you may utilize. It proves that you are not an accident, you are here and alive for a higher purpose.