Dear Lexie,

Walking on Water

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The Work of Grace

God’s Grace

The odd thing about God’s grace is that those in the most pain, whom we might think would want it the most, resist it fiercely, while those who reflect it to others seem to think they don’t deserve it. One of the best examples of this in current popular culture....

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Mountain Trails

Committee Goals

I love mountain biking. Not a flat trail by the C&O canal, but a single track leading up a mountain. When I was in
graduate school in Loma Linda CA, a friend and I would go mountain biking 4 days a week. There’s something about the discipline of the climb and ....

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Milestones
Looking back at God’s blessings

Each new year, before I think about formalizing resolutions designed to propel me to new and better things, I like to sit and remember the many things for which I have to be thankful.

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WALKING ON WATER

By nellenday On January 31, 2013 • Add Comment • In eWeekend, Uncategorized

There are times when pastors feel as though a sermon that they have labored over long and hard and then finally shared has had so little impact on the congregation and ultimately it never even made its way past the first pew. But then there are those moments when a message has resonated so powerfully with the congregation that it has created a ripple effect and ends up turning into a tidal wave. The success of this message, if you can call it that, is not due to any eloquence or charisma the preacher might possess, but is simply the result of the message finding a place in the hearts of its listeners at a critical time in their lives. I believe the message I shared last Sabbath, Walking on Water is one of those messages.

Let me say this at the onset, it is extremely challenging at times for preachers to determine the impact that a message may have on their audience while the message is being preached. I learned very early in my ministry, that as a pastor, I should never equate silence or blank stares with disinterest or boredom on the part of the congregation. Well, at least not in every case. But as I stated earlier, there are those special moments when the message and the needs of its listeners are in perfect tune with one another.

The call that God has placed on our lives individually as well as corporately, to leave the confines of our “boats,” those areas in our lives that due to fear are holding us back, and begin to take steps to walk on water, is a call that transcends race, gender and socioeconomic backgrounds. As I said on Sabbath, how will we ever experience the reality of the bigness that is God if we never attempt to do the impossible? And that’s what Peter did. He stepped out of the safety of his boat, and under the power and conviction of the call of God on his life, did what no one else in that boat for the remainder of their lives could ever take credit for doing; walking on water.

I challenge you today to join the ranks of the “water walkers” – to become one of those that despite the negative reports from the naysayers of life, as well as those who attempt to rent space in your head, will be determined to keep your eyes not on these distractions, but rather on the God that called you onto the water. And when that day comes, and trust me it will come, the only thing those around you will be able to say is, Wow, look at them, they are Walking On Water!
"It is not complicated to lead the spiritual life. But it is difficult." — Thomas Merton, Seeds.

The odd thing about God’s grace is that those in the most pain, whom we might think would want it the most, resist it fiercely, while those who reflect it to others seem to think they don’t deserve it. One of the best examples of this in current popular culture is Les Miserables, the movie adaptation of the much-loved Broadway musical.

Jean Valjean, an ex-convict and a forgiven man, has vowed to live a better life and to care for Cosette, the illegitimate daughter of Fantine, a woman who has been fired from his factory, has turned to prostitution to support her daughter, and is dying.

Javert, the prison guard who tracks Valjean relentlessly for breaking parole, is a man bound by duty, sworn to uphold the law no matter the circumstances. His dedication to the pursuit and his loyalty to the law become a personal crusade to see Valjean hung. He will not turn aside, he will not grant mercy, he will not give up the chase, despite the fact that Valjean, who at one point holds him captive, refuses to kill him. In the end, Javert commits suicide, in part because he could not distinguish between his civic duty and his personal morality. The grace and forgiveness offered him by Valjean he rejects with vehemence because he will not deviate from the law even for mercy’s sake.

Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk quoted above, assures us that in trying to live a spiritual life we must expect to make a thousand mistakes. “It is when we are angry at our own mistakes that we tend most of all to deny ourselves for love of ourselves . . . We become incapable of existing except as a ‘no,’ which we fling in the face of everything.” Javert, like many of us, could not reconcile himself to the grace given nor could he not do his duty, since that is all that gave him purpose.

“The things we really need come to us only as gifts,” says Merton, “and in order to receive them as gifts we have to be open.” Merton suggests that it is our fixation on our own autonomy and “self-willed identity” that closes us off from God’s grace.

What are we fighting for, I wonder? The times when I have felt most free and yet most ‘myself’ have been those moments when I opened myself to God’s grace and reveled in the lifting of the darkness within me.

Perhaps that is the work of grace we can do, moment by moment, into the day.
Leaving a Reply
I love mountain biking. Not a flat trail by the C&O canal, but a single track leading up a mountain. When I was in graduate school in Loma Linda CA, a friend and I would go mountain biking 4 days a week. There’s something about the discipline of the climb and the exhilarating view from the top made this a perfect way to start the day. At the top one could see a dozen different trails, and each one required a different skill set to get down. Part of the fun was picking which trail we were going to go down, would it be Jedi trail that you could fly down at 30 miles an hour going around tight blind corners with high banked turns? Would it be down knife edge trail with a section of trail connecting two ridges that was no wider than a bike tire? Would it be down dead man’s hill trail with a long downhill so steep you would have to put the bike seat all the way down just so you wouldn’t flip over your handlebars? And then the exhilaration of the ride began as we made the final leg of the journey home.

To me, as Stewardship chair, I don’t think of the goal of our committee as merely to raise money. It is much harder and broader than that. It is also to get people so involved in our ministries with their time and talent that they have a strong sense of ownership. After all, who takes stewardship more seriously, an owner or a renter?

Today we have reached the summit. With God’s help we have had the disciplined climb out of debt. While there will be other financial challenges ahead, they all lead to one or more rewarding trails of ministry. Which exhilarating path will you invest your time in and make your own? Where can you exercise a budding talent or further sharpen an existing skill set? Perhaps, like me, you love children. I have taught in the kindergarten Sabbath school since 2004, but each of the 4 other teachers and the piano player have been there much longer. One leader, Dana West, has been helping out in this Sabbath School since she was 14. Yes, that is dedication and that is service—but what an amazingly fun walk with God! Perhaps it is working with the media team in their outreach over the internet, on in the hospitality team. Whatever ministry ignites your passion or your sense of adventure, I urge you to pick one or more of these paths this year—paths that you can throw yourself into with God and other members who share your interests. Because we are nearing home, and this final leg of the journey is going to be fantastic.
Each new year, before I think about formalizing resolutions designed to propel me to new and better things, I like to sit and remember the many things for which I have to be thankful. At an end of year function with a small group from Sligo, we were asked to share one thing from the year that left us the most thankful. When it came my turn I said, “I am so thankful that with God’s help we paid off the OSR this year.” I am sure this is something for which our entire church family can give a heart-felt thanks to God.

BACKGROUND

The current building in which the Sligo Church family gathers was completed in 1944. In 1985 we built an addition however by 2001, it was clear that there was need for significant renovation. Our congregation initiated a project labeled the Organ Sanctuary Renovation (OSR) project. The work included allowing more natural light at the front of the church (behind the pulpit), installing a new maple stage, a baptistery with Jerusalem marble, a Daffer organ and pipes and pews on the main floor. Acoustics were also improved. The original cost increased to $4.36 million when it became apparent that there was significant asbestos in the...
THE PLAN

In May 2005 we started making payments on this 20-year, 7.0% fixed interest loan, with a monthly payment of $16,500. By 2009, despite an economy that was in a tailspin, we began a concerted effort to pay off the loan early. The campaign highlighted the endless possibilities of what an extra $16,500 could do for our many ministries. Pastor Tapp wrote a piece for the eSteward entitled “What if...” accenting the potential of invigorated ministries. And we as a church eagerly got to work to retire our debt early, not only save many hundreds of thousands of dollars in interest, but to free up offerings that can be used to further the many vibrant ministries of our church.
MILESTONES

By June of 2009, our monthly interest payments fell below $10,000 for the first time. A bequest from an estate came in so that by the end of the year along with faithful giving by so many members, the loan amount had dropped from $1.9 million to $1.3 million, with about $10,000 a month going to pay off principal. By the end of 2010 our loan amount was below $1 million and by the end of 2011 it was below $800,000. And this was during a time when we, along with Sligo Adventist School, elected to raise $350,000 for our school as a condition for a generous donation from the Commonwealth Foundation. During 2012 several donations from anonymous donors and 2 bequests came in that allowed us to pay off our remaining OSR debt by Thanksgiving. And what a joyous Thanksgiving we had! Praise be to God! And thanks to each one of you who faithfully continued to give to this project.

NEW BEGINNING

So now at this birth of a new year, we give thanks to be free from the burden of debt. This new found freedom should embolden us to know that nothing is too hard for God. Not finding a way out of Egypt for the children of Israel, not paying off a $2.3 million loan in the face of a shaky economy. And if He can do that, what else can He do for Sligo? Which Sligo ministry would you like to support with your time, talents and money? How does
that giving engage with your new year’s resolution? And with that investment, what are the exhilarating, life-changing things God can do? The possibilities are truly endless.

Luke 6:38 “If you give, you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over. Whatever measure you use in giving—large or small—it will be used to measure what is given back to you.” (New Living Translation)

By: Dr. James Gulley

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ONE RESPONSE TO MILESTONES

Karl says:
January 11, 2013 at 5:29 pm

Thanks for your leadership of the Stewardship Committee during the “sprint to the finish line,” James. An encouraging report; the pictures are great!