

“Streams in the Desert”

November 21, 2010

Grove Presbyterian Church

How’s your driving these days on these Highways?

If God were a State Trooper, would God pull you over? What for? [with a nod to Serendipity Support Series, “Streams in the Desert”]

Speeding? Are you not slowing down to smell the roses?
Failing to yield? Always trying to do things your way?
Blocking traffic? Getting in the way of others who are progressing?
Illegal U-Turn? Trying to live in the past?
Wrong Way on a One Way Street? You need to turn your life around?
Or are you stuck the side of the road? Run out of gas. Gas tank empty?

On my cross country drive last April, out of the 9,422 miles I drove, there was only one stretch where I really worried about running out of gas.

The Ocotillo Wells and the Anza-Borrego Desert National Park in Southern California was far more desolate than Death Valley. In Death Valley there was a fair amount of traffic, plus Frank as a traveling companion.

There on that secluded road to the Salton Sea, I was alone. Desolate and isolated, I -- lonely traveler -- felt a rare twinge of apprehension.

Running on empty. Scary thing. Resources insufficient.

How about your gas tank? What does your spiritual gauge indicate? [with a nod to Serendipity Support Series, “Streams in the Desert”]

The support you have? Gas tank empty or full tank?
The encouragement you receive? Empty or full?
Direction in your life? Empty or full?
Hope? Full or empty?

Running out of gas. And we’re not just driving through the desert -- we are the desert. Arid. Barren. Feeling dry. Isolated.

Well, I have one suggestion. Of course I do. The best remedy.

I learnt something valuable a long time ago from a certain psychologist in this congregation who counsels dying children. It made me look at charity differently. In particular, the Make-A-Wish Foundation. It has its merits. Help a child suffering from

life threatening illness fulfill a wish: a trip to Disney, a glamorous make-over. That's nice. A fine memory. A laugh. A smile. Happy times with mom and dad.

But there is a finer memory. Something more meaningful. The psychologist would encourage the children dying from cancer to reach out to others and do something for them.

There was this young woman in our congregation. Due to her Parkinson's and palsies, she was trapped in a nursing home, surrounded by old folks, them drooling, confused. Folks tried to make her feel better. They brought her gifts all the time. But the melancholy spiraled. Until she was challenged to start praying for others. Until she was challenged to start sending out cards to others on our church sick list.

Slowly, she began to feel better than happy. She felt useful.

Break out of the seclusion and be useful for others. Who needs an invitation? Who might be eating alone? Who needs a card, a prayer, a visible prayer?

[Invite forward guest speaker]

Besides, I really don't think organ donation is going to deter God's effectiveness when it comes time to your resurrection.

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One thing about a desert. All it needs is a good rain to bring it to bloom. Suddenly, the sand bursts vibrant with flowers.

All it needs is a little water. Plus patience.

Such was the favorite Bible image of the new age, the age of God. You see it in Isaiah, Genesis, Exodus, Zechariah, Ezekiel, Amos, and in Revelation – everywhere.

No longer is the land a desert, dry, barren, but lush and verdant. The people, our souls, are watered by the living stream that flows from the divine source – the living water. All grace and goodness. Revelation describes for us the new Paradise, the new Eden, water and fruit.

The wasteland turned fertile and abundant. And he restoreth my soul. So we may restore the souls of others on the road, along the way. Empty tanks filled and replenished.

How do you cultivate and replenish your soul?

Ponder the Hazelnut. That is what the mystic Julian of Norwich did one day.

*Also in this He shewed me a little thing, the quantity of an hazel-nut, in the palm of my hand; and it was as round as a ball. I looked thereupon with eye of my understanding, and thought: What may this be? And it was answered generally thus: It is all that is made. I marvelled how it might last, for methought it might suddenly have fallen to naught for little[ness] ...In this Little Thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it, the second is that God loveth it, the third, that God keepeth it.*

Who is our God? The Maker, the Lover, the Keeper. All from a hazelnut.

If a nut, us too. Our Maker, our Lover, our Keeper.

Christ Jesus gave all of himself that we might live; we at least can give bits and pieces.