

March, 2010

Letting Go into the Mystery

Why is it that when we are very young, we love being around our grandparents? Grandparents have no time for wasted words or motions. They have a beautiful way of being silent and exact at the same time. If they don't like something, someone, or action, they tell you right away. They cut right to the heart of matters while often the rest of us are chatting needlessly. We love our grandparents because we know down deep they are using time and space way more gracefully and efficiently than we are.

Nowadays, when we wake in the morning, we cannot wait to plug in our electronic devices, connecting with thousands of channels all across the world allowing people we hardly know to fill our heads with explanations and answers to assuage our anxieties and apprehensions. We live in an age when an instant answer is needed in order to turn the chapters of the next day or even the next hour.



Within this environment, it is becoming a much bigger temptation not to trust God and his Holy Spirit. We are impatient and demand an answer now. Our faith is fragile. We are fidgety. We do not trust God enough to wait upon him and his direction. We are nervous to call anything a mystery. We live in the information age, a time when there are no longer mysteries; everything must be explained!

In the Garden of Eden, God warned Adam against the dangers of stretching too far and wanting to know and explain what is unhealthy for a human to pursue. Genesis, chapter two, verses 15 through 17 read, "The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. But the Lord warned him, 'You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden – except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.'"

I will never forget the time I was in Kenya in the early 1990s with a mission team. It was an early Sunday morning and I was leading my group to worship with a rural congregation of East African Presbyterians. We were told to head directly west and look for the people worshipping under a tree.

I will always remember that moment of looking for this particular "tree church." As a North American, I had never before entertained the idea of a church not having four walls. And, there were a plethora of trees out in that particular part of Kenya; I had no idea really how to begin our search.



But, we kept driving our dusty jeep along the bumpy roads, trusting we would find it. Eventually, through a beautiful clearing, we came upon a wonderful, humble group of Kenyans huddled under a large, strong tree; they were patiently waiting for us. The Kenyans assumed we would participate in their service, but hardly a word was said about who would do what in the order of worship. After a while, and for what seemed like an eternity, we gathered hands, listened to the wind, and sought the voice of God together. The tree branches swayed, and so did our souls. I will never forget those 15 minutes as long as I live; it was a ton of silence for us North Americans. Finally, an elder in the church spoke up and asked one of my elders to pray. The prayer led to a song,

and the song to a sermon, and soon we were understanding each other and worshipping with few promptings or plans.

God is in the business of emancipating our souls, breaking through barriers, untying our knots, and making straight our paths. If we strain too hard to figure out the ineffable, rush to conclusions without patience, and continue to give God no silence in which to speak, we invariably barrel headlong into our own dead ends, often wondering how we became so frustrated and so stuck. It is especially then that we need our grandparents or our Heavenly Father to put their arms around us and tell us to slow down.

The Scriptures are clear; answers come for those who wait on the Lord. Often, God's will is revealed slowly through our deepest struggles, perplexities and pain. Yet, if we choose to walk with the Lord through those valleys, even the valley of death, his glory becomes manifest and known. But, we cannot walk through such valleys alone; we need the community of the faithful to go with us.

My family and I want to thank you for walking so closely with us this past month through my diagnosis of lymphoma and the beginnings of my chemotherapy. The doctors are pleased with my progress; my body and soul are holding up well under the treatments, which I can only attribute to your prayers and love. You are helping us walk into the mystery of our future together with God. We are waiting on him. And like our Kenyan friends, together we are seeking the voice of our God.