



The Link

SPRING 2016

Telling the Stories God is Writing at Little Falls Church

We
joyfully
PROCLAIM
the love
of God in
Jesus Christ,
GROW
in His truth,
and
SHARE
His Gospel
with our
neighbors.

*All the nations
you have
made shall
come
and
worship
before you,
O Lord,
and shall
glorify your
name.*

- Psalm 86:9

Learning to Notice

Dr. Matt Merrill, Pastor

Thirty years ago this spring, Ferris Bueller took his famous day off from high school. Ferris, his girlfriend, Sloane, and his best friend, Cameron, have an epic day. They go to a Cubs game, a parade, the Art Institute of Chicago, and more. At the end of the day, Ferris and Cameron have this exchange:

Ferris: Cameron, what have you seen today?

Cameron: Nothing good.

Ferris: Nothing - wha - what do you mean nothing good? We've seen everything good. We've seen the whole city! We went to a museum, we saw priceless works of art! We ate pancreas!

While I would love to have the adventurous spirit of Ferris, all too often, I am Cameron. While on sabbatical in 2011, I started to notice how active God was in the world. It was the space of that time away that helped me see the reality of God's constant activity. I wanted to keep my awareness of that reality with me when I reentered my normal patterns of life, because an awareness of God's incessant activity is good medicine for a weary soul.

So, I began the practice of "noticing." It is a spiritual discipline where you intentionally set your mind on noticing the activity of God. I set a daily quota of trying to notice at least five things God was doing. They could be anything; a plant beginning to sprout; the scriptures shouting words of joy; the encouragement of a Christian friend; an answered prayer. I have never run out of new things to notice - for our God is very active.

In the five years since, I have noticed that this constant awareness of God's activity in each day has led me to more joy and less melancholy. But even more than that, I have a greater desire to find out what God is up to and try to join in.

Opening Our Hearts & Homes to Sojourners

Michelle Knott

Lately, I have been pondering the word *sojourner*. A sojourner is one who takes a far journey, or one who resides in a strange country. It is sometimes translated “foreigner”. Abraham and Moses called themselves sojourners. And the Bible says that even we Christians are sojourners – living out our days in a strange country (Earth) – until we make our home with God one day. But it is God’s heart for sojourners that I find so touching. He says: “Love the sojourner therefore, for you were sojourners in Egypt.” (Deut. 10:19) Again, He says: “Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners.” Have we ever stopped to think about that? How would it feel to be a foreigner? Would you feel homesick? Overwhelmed? Frightened? Lonely?

However out of place someone may feel here on earth, they won’t feel out of place in Heaven! As we know from Revelation: “ All the nations will bring their glory and honor into the New Jerusalem.” (Rev. 21:26) Heaven will have the colors, beauty and flavor of every tribe and language on earth. What if our families embraced these colors and flavors right now? I believe that loving international people today is an investment toward our future in Heaven, which will be the most wonderful melting pot ever!

About ten years ago, we began intentionally welcoming sojourners into our home. When someone comes into your home, I believe you have the best opportunity to share the love of Jesus with them. That’s because if you are a follower of Jesus, the Holy Spirit not only dwells *in* you but is present in your home. When people come over they can sense His spirit, and He starts to work. Through *CouchSurfing*, we host strangers who are traveling through DC and need a place to stay. While they sightsee during the day, in the evenings, we share stories, play Spoons (with chopsticks), and often share deep conversations about life and faith.

Abdullah and Mehri, two young professionals from Iran, came for one night. As soon as we sat down to dinner, Abdullah told us how he had been watching debates on the Internet between Christians and Muslims. He had lots of questions and was eager to talk about God. We shared with him a copy of the wonderful book, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*. When he and his wife left the next morning, this is what they wrote in our guest book: “One who enters your home is not the same person who leaves it later. Love has saturated this house: love to God, love to family, love to life, and love to fellow beings”. Praise God that they felt the love of God and were drawn closer to Him! We continue to keep in touch by email.

In addition to *CouchSurfing*, we also enjoy reaching out in other ways to foreigners in our midst.

Sojourn – a period of time when you stay in a place as a traveler or guest. A temporary stay.

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We love to host international students at Thanksgiving. Last year, we had three darling Saudi girls who are studying at Marymount University join us for the holiday. I also teach English as a Second Language, and we befriended one of my students from Iran. He came for dinner and after a couple weeks, he needed a place to stay. So he has been living with us since Thanksgiving. Then there are the people we meet when we're out running errands. I met a man at Target recently from Nepal, who just arrived in the U.S. a few months ago. I got his number, and we are going to invite him and his family over for dinner.

Remember in *Les Miserables* when Jean Valjean, an ex-convict, showed up at the priest's house, asking for help? The priest said, "You need not tell me who you are. This is not my house; it is the house of Christ. It does not ask any comer whether he has a name, but whether he has an affliction. You are suffering; you are hungry and thirsty; be welcome. Your name is my brother." It sounds a lot like Jesus, doesn't it? He told us, "Whatever you do for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you do for me." We want to remember that our house is not our house; it is the house of Christ.

Interestingly, with all these people coming through our home, we feel like we are the ones most blessed. It is an honor to meet so many fascinating and beautiful people from all over the world. They share such unique stories and perspectives. They teach us about other cultures, government systems, even types of food. They remind us that there is a great big world out there, and we don't always have the right answers. We also remember that God is not a white American, and Heaven – thankfully – won't be homogeneous. In many ways, rubbing shoulders with international friends has been one of the richest blessings in our life.

To sum it up, in a country that is growing increasingly hostile to immigrants, Christian hospitality gets people's attention. Frankly, it blows their minds. And for many, it is the first time they ever experience the tangible love of Christ. But don't just take my word for it. Paul said, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." (Hebrews 13:2) You never know when you might have an angel over for dinner! If you open your home to sojourners who are far from theirs, I believe you will be blessed. I know I have been. Besides, God's heart is for the nations. Shouldn't ours be as well?

*For
through HIM
we both have access
in one Spirit to the Father.
So then
you are
no longer
strangers and aliens,
but you are
fellow citizens
with the saints
and
members of
the household of God.*

– Ephesians 2:18-19



*Easter
Egg
Hunt
2016*





Church

Family

News

New Members

John & Kimberly Wayne

Baptisms

Brendan Andrews (1/10)

Kimberly Wayne (3/13)

Promoted to Glory

Betty Edwards – (12/20)

Armand Poyant – (3/10)

Alice Schilberg – (3/18)

“Seeking justice begins with seeking the God of justice.”
- Bethany Hoang, *Deepening the Soul for Justice*

Little Falls and International Justice Mission

Kelly Pulsifer – Elder for National & World Missions

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”
– Matthew 7:7

Last year, LFPC’s Session began a process that we hope to further refine this year. It is our plan to focus our mission giving in such a way that we have substantial impact on a target community, and that our giving in turn grows our hearts.

Little Falls has for years given to a camp in Monte Plata in the Dominican Republic, where they run a *Summer’s Best Two Weeks* program. We’ve found that we can generate interest in regular mission trips to this camp to assist in maintenance and building projects. It is a small way to serve the poor of the Monte Plata community; however, we began asking how we might make a bigger difference in a country that suffers enormous poverty. God has answered that question in the form of an opportunity to partner with an organization that does tremendous work to help a very specific population in the Dominican Republic.

Last April, Matt Merrill, Kimberly Lane and I attended *International Justice Mission’s* (IJM) Global Prayer Gathering. We spent much of two days praying for the staff, the clients, and the political institutions where IJM works to end all forms of slavery. Toward the end of our time at the conference, we spent an hour praying with and for the staff and the people of the Dominican Republic (DR). In the DR, IJM’s mission is to rescue teen victims of sex trafficking, rehabilitate the teens, and prosecute the traffickers. At the same time, IJM advocates for changes to the political system that currently perpetuates conditions where this sort of slavery can happen. At the time of the prayer gathering, the director of the DR office was asking for prayers for funds to open an aftercare facility where rescued teens could live safely, rehabilitate, and experience the healing power of God’s love. We knew then that Little Falls could and should commit to financial support of their facility.

Our financial support, made possible via our Be Rich offering last May, led to an opportunity to partner with the field office in the DR. We are still working out the details as to how that partnership will work, and are hopeful that we can figure out a way to support IJM’s work and that of the church in Monte Plata not only through financial support but also a short-term mission trip. When those details are worked out, we will let everyone know. Meanwhile, we ask for continued prayers for the work of IJM in the DR: for love, perseverance and protection for their staff and the victims they serve. It is an organization that believes in the power of prayer, and I will continue to share their prayer requests that we might not just give money toward their fight, but commit our hearts and lift our voices to end this form of slavery in the Dominican Republic.

A Love Story

Grace Merrill, Link Editor

There are a lot of little girls who live in my house. We listen to plenty of Taylor Swift. "Love Story" came on one day recently as I was running errands in my van. At the last part of the song, I noticed tears in my eyes. How embarrassing! What's the matter with me? Then a few days later, the SAME THING HAPPENED. Why was this cutesy, pop song doing this to me? As I listened to it and considered the words, I began to figure it out. It was the part toward the end where she is about to give up hope that the boy she loves will come for her. Then he shows up and pulls out a ring. Okay, it's cliché but I believe there is a reason it tugs at our hearts. Yes, we all long for romance. We all long to be loved. But I think there is even more to it – a reason we have heard this "fairy tale love story" in countless love songs and literature: because it is imprinted in our hearts by our creator. Because He keeps whispering it to all of us. Because it is His story.

"Romeo, save me" is a line in the song. We need saving. We want a rescuer. We can tell something is not right. We long for something or someone to fix it and save us from the broken world we face every day. Someone or something to save us from ourselves. A hero to make everything right. To get us "out of this mess" (another line from the song). Whether you are a Christian or not, this longing is there because He made us for Himself and we are lost without Him. But we are broken by our sin. "You were Romeo. I was a Scarlet Letter". This sin has separated us from our True Love and left debilitating scars on creation.

But there is hope for restoration. In the song, Romeo is "throwing pebbles" at her window, trying to get her attention. Our savior pursues us, whispers to us, sometimes shouts to us, to get our attention.

"My faith in you was fading, when I met you on the outskirts of town and I said: 'Romeo, save me. I've been feeling so alone.' I keep waiting for you but you never come. Is this in my head? I don't know what to think..."

The outskirts of town sound lonely. Life has broken our hearts. We doubt. We wait. We wander.

HE has not forgotten. He comes for us!

"I talked to your dad, go pick out a white dress". ... *"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."* (Isaiah 1:18)

Maybe those tears in my eyes came from pollen or fatigue, but it sure seems to me like He was speaking to me. Reminding me that He loves us. That He is still rescuing and redeeming. That He is coming back for His Church, His Bride, one day and it will be an ending that tops all our fairy tales.

*God,
who needs
nothing,
LOVES
into existence
wholly
superfluous
creatures
in order that
He may love
and
perfect them.*

- C. S. Lewis

*Come out of sadness
From wherever you've been
Come broken hearted
Let rescue begin
Come find your mercy
Oh sinner come kneel
Earth has no sorrow
That heaven can't heal*

*- David Crowder
"Come As You Are"*



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