

July 2019
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July 1, 2019 – A Big Announcement

I remember when my father began the process of selling Yellowstone Air Service to a couple of young pilots. His businesses had become complex and he was working 14 to 16 hour days to keep everything running. The process took a couple of years. First he sold the agricultural chemicals application business with the associated airplanes. Then the forest service contracts, fire patrols and fish and game animal counts. Shortly afterward the airport fixed base operations were also transferred to the company he had sold. I was just beginning my academic career and my father was careful to have a conversation with me about whether or not I wanted to go into the flying portion of the family business. I was not leaning in that direction and did not think that it would be my life's work. At one point my father said, I've been doing this for 25 years and we've had a good run with no injury accidents and we can make more money by selling the business than by running it.

At the time 25 years seemed like a very long time to me. I wasn't yet 25 years old, so the thought of doing one job for 25 years was very impressive to me. I agreed that it was time for him to cut back from flying every day and sell the business to some younger people.

A few years later, after I had finished seminary, my father told me that he was selling the farm machinery side of his business. Once again he made the comment about having been a John Deere dealer for 25 years. "Twenty five years is enough" he said.

The Bible doesn't make a big deal over the number 25. One of its favorite numbers to describe a long time is 40. The rains fall for 40 days and 40 nights in the story of the great flood and the ark. The people of Israel wander in the wilderness for 40 years. That is mirrored by Jesus' 40 days of being tempted in the wilderness. Forty is a big number in the bible.

I've had the numbers, memories and stories swimming in my head for several months as I prepared for yesterday's experience. Susan and I stood in the middle of the chancel of our church and announced that on June 30, 2020, one year from yesterday, we will end our calls as ministers in this congregation. It will be 25 years that we have pastored this congregation. It will also be nearly 42 years that we have served as ordained ministers of the United Church of Christ.

Since my first job, sweeping a feed warehouse every Saturday, I've never had a period in my life when I haven't had at least a part-time job. I did take nearly three months off in the summer of 1978, after finishing my degree and ending my work with the Wholistic Health Care Center in Hinsdale, Illinois and before beginning as pastor of two small congregations in North Dakota. I had already secured the call to the churches before I put in my notice at the health care center, however. We traveled with family and made the move to our new home over the summer. Since then, I've always gone directly from

one job to the next, not that I've changed jobs that often. But in each case, I've had a regular paycheck each month. One year from now, I'm going to be doing a whole new thing for me.

Of course it isn't new to millions of other folks. Retirement is commonly accepted in the United States as a way to change the pace of one's life and to make jobs available for younger workers. In partnership with the congregations I have served, I've been saving for retirement since my career began.

Still, it was a major announcement for me to stand in front of the congregation and tell them that I have set a date for the end of my call to this congregation and that I don't know exactly what is coming next.

I know that I won't mind a change of pace. Some days seem pretty long to me. I get tired more easily than was the case a few decades ago. I don't accomplish as much as I once was able to do. I also know that I would like, for the first time since I became ordained, to be specific about where I live. We have always moved to the place of our next call to ministry. This time, we are being specific, wanting to live close enough to our son and our grandchildren that we can attend their concerts and plays and games as they grow into their teenage years. I like, for the first time, to be able to attend grandparents day at our grandchildren's school.

There are, of course, many uncertainties. This is true for anyone who retires.

Our son, being the sensitive kid that he is and caring a lot about his parents, called me at the end of my work day yesterday. I was still at the church, just locking the doors when his call came. He was just checking in on me because he knew that I was going to make the announcement to the congregation yesterday. It was as I was talking with him that it sort of hit me what I have done. It is a big deal to me. I love my work. I love the congregation that I serve. But as my father said, "25 years is enough." I don't want to burn out on the job. I don't want to overstay my welcome. I want to leave with enough energy and enthusiasm to discover what comes next in my life.

So I've made the announcement. I've launched a year of preparation and challenge. I don't intend to be a lame duck. I've got some fresh ideas for worship and for how I work with volunteer leaders in the congregation. I've got a few goals for the year to come before I step into the pulpit for the last time. I don't think God is finished with me yet.

Onward.

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July 2, 2019 – Changing Times

One summer before I had my driver's license, I was mowing lawns and delivering papers for spending money. I know I'm dating myself. My children can't remember a time when the newspaper delivery person wasn't an adult and my grandchildren don't know what daily newspaper delivery is. At any rate, I could get all my papers delivered by 6 am and have the rest of the day for whatever I wanted, so I borrowed \$25 from my dad and with the \$25 I had saved, I purchased a walk behind lawn mower and began to line up jobs.

My most lucrative job was the lawn of a family that I supposed were rich people. They were going to spend the summer in Europe and so hired me to not only mow, but also to water their lawn for the summer. They offered \$4 per week and I accepted. It was big money for me. 12 weeks of that and I'd own my lawn mower from that job alone. After that everything except a bit of gas and an occasional quart of oil was pure profit. I was sitting pretty.

Of course the money involved dates me as well. You can't buy a new lawn mower for \$50 these days. Susan and I are planning a trip this summer and I'll be grateful if I can find someone to mow my lawn for \$40 a week.

I remember thinking that the people for whom I mowed their lawn must be rich because they were spending the summer in Europe. We spent six weeks in Europe with my parents and sister and her husband at a point when we had very little money. Other than our plane tickets, the trip was fairly inexpensive. We stayed in youth hostels or with friends. We traveled in a rented van. We visited a lot of attractions such as castles and cathedrals that were free or inexpensive to visit.

And now look at us. We went to Japan for three weeks last summer as part of a sabbatical and we are returning to Japan for three weeks this summer. Two trips in two years. It is an extravagance for us and we are dipping into our savings once again, but we have good reason. Our daughter lives in Japan and she is expecting a baby this month. Grandchildren exert a very powerful force on grandparents and we feel the pull strongly.

For two years during our time in seminary, I served as an intern with a church and health clinic in Hinsdale, Illinois. I remember driving around Hinsdale in our little car looking at the houses. We decided that we would never in our lives live in a subdivision where the median home price was \$100,000 as was the case in that town at that time. And yet, here we are, living in a subdivision where the median home price is well above \$250,000 and we're willing to pay \$40 to have our lawn mowed. I guess that we've become rich by all of the definitions that I had when I was younger.

The truth is that we've been extremely fortunate in so many aspects of our lives. I'm pretty sure that our net worth won't impress anyone. We've saved for our retirement all of our working years, but that bit of money is not significant by modern standards. A good retirement planner would advise us that we aren't in the best position to be considering retirement. But we've never developed a need for new possessions and we don't think that happiness is best demonstrated by the size of our bank account. Consider the fact that we are very happy to dip into our savings to go visit our daughter, son in law and new grandson. Being with family is simply more important to us than having lots of money. No one has forced us to make the decisions we have made. We have lived our lives the way that we want.

I know a few horror stories about congregations who have abused the clergy who have served them. They have offered substandard salaries, foregone raises when finances were tight, and in at least one case, failed to make regular payments to the pension fund. I've met clergy whose health insurance required substantial co-pays out of already meager salaries. None of those things have ever happened to us. The congregations we have served have been generous and fair to us. We made decisions, including the decision to job share and live on a single salary for the early years of our careers. That gave us more time with our children when they were at home and more time for pursuing other interests. We could have insisted on both working full time and earned more money. We could have developed strategies to save a larger portion of our salaries. But we are comfortable with the choices we have made. We have had a good life and meaningful careers. We have served among people who have been loving and caring and faithful.

For years I thought that I would be able to write books and that the books would supplement our retirement income. The truth is that I've never written any of the books I've imagined. I have several partial manuscripts, but it is unlikely that they will ever become books. I could edit the essays of my journal into volumes of collected essays, but there isn't much money in publishing books these days unless you become a best-seller, something that seems very unlikely in my case. When we were beginning our careers and job sharing, so theoretically working part time, I supplemented our family income by driving a school bus and working at a radio station. I've worked at newspapers, done free-lance writing and pursued several other small streams of income over the years. Prior to being ordained, I worked as a janitor and did furniture repair. I don't have much retail experience but I'm capable of selling tools or lumber in a big box store. I'm not worrying about money. We'll find enough.

The old formula, however, won't work in these times. \$40 per week is a long ways short of the price of a lawn mower these days. And \$500 won't buy much of a mower. Maybe I'll think of something else. On the other hand, I can save money by mowing my own lawn.

July 3, 2019 – Imagination

Human imagination is fascinating. I am continually impressed with the ideas that others have and their ability to innovate. I know that imagination is critical to many of the things that I do. I use imagination and creativity to interpret the connection between ancient texts and modern life. I use imagination to solve problems when working with other people. I use imagination to create artful layout for newsletters and web sites and other communications pieces.

My imagination isn't limited to the practical, however. Sometimes I find myself thinking about things that seem to have no practical application. Last night I was lying in bed, awakened by a passing thunderstorm and I found myself thinking about what it would be like to have an ocean-going yacht. Now I'm never going to own a yacht, unless you could canoes and kayaks. I'm never even going to own a coastal cruiser. I've lived my life in the center of the continent. I have no experience with true seamanship. I don't have the financial means to purchase, let alone operate, an ocean-going vessel. And as the years go by it seems less and less likely that I will make having a larger boat a priority of my time or my financial resources. So why does my mind wander to something that I know I'll never do?

I've imagined things that I'll never do. I'll never sail my own ship around the world. I'll never climb Mount Everest. I'll never own a private jet. Knowing that there are things that I'll never do isn't a disappointment to me. I'm not sad that I won't do those things. I have a happy life and I've done and am doing the things that are most important to me. When I was a young man I thought it would be a fun thing to be a grandpa and I thought I'd probably be pretty good at it when the time came. Now I am a grandpa and it is much more wonderful than I was able to imagine. I wanted to be married from an early age and after 46 years of marriage I am delighted that I found such a wonderful partner and have such a good marriage.

Many of the things that I once imagined have come to pass. And yet my mind continues to imagine things that will never happen. I also have some practical dreams and my imagination can stretch to things that can be accomplished. I've put a lot of energy into imagining this summer's vacation and it will come to pass. I've invested years imagining some of the building improvements at our church and they will be accomplished. I've invested energy in imagining the structure of worship for a care center service on Friday and for our congregation on Sunday. I've created drafts of the worship bulletins for both services. They will come to pass and are worthy of my imagination.

Sometimes, however, when I am relaxed and not under pressure my mind will wander to things that are far beyond the realm of possibility.

I suppose that the capacity to imagine the impossible is essential to human progress. I've certainly done things that I never imagined would come to pass. When I accepted

the call to serve this congregation, I was unable to think beyond about a decade of serving. Now, I've been her 24 years. I've gone beyond my expectations. I doubt if humans, when imagining the possibility of flight before the first airplane was made could imagine that we'd go from the Wright Brothers to transcontinental airlines within span of less than a lifetime. I'm sure that the first person who dreamed of traveling to the moon had no idea of what was involved in space travel or how much money people would be willing to invest in such adventures.

The capacity to imagine things that are beyond our reach has enabled humans to accomplish much that once was thought to be impossible.

I'm not one for living in my fantasies. I seem to be fully aware of what I am doing when I am dreaming of things that I'll never accomplish. And there is an increasing practicality to my thought as I age. When I was younger, I didn't know whether or not I'd own a private airplane when I got to be 60. Now I know the answer to that question. When I was younger, I didn't know how many children we would have. Now I do, though there is still some mystery when it comes to grandchildren.

I'm not going to start building an ocean-going vessel in my backyard even if there may be a few more canoes or kayaks in my boat-building future. I'm not going to start writing the great American novel, though I'll keep writing every day for some time to come. I don't think I'll take up skydiving, though I think I probably will have many more opportunities to ride in airplanes. I doubt that I'll ever live in another country, though there are a few more international trips in my future and I'm sure I'll renew my passport when it expires in 2021.

Perhaps our imaginations have to over shoot in order to help us think beyond the simple. Maybe we have to imagine really big adventures just to climb out of the ruts and routines that we form in everyday life. I don't know for sure. What I do know is that my imagination, when I allow it to wander, will take me to places that I will never go in this life. I know that it isn't a problem to have a few things that I can imagine but that I will never do. And who knows? Perhaps one of those wild fantasies will one day become a reality. After all, I've had many wonderful things happen in my life that I didn't expect.

I'll keep listening to the rain and allowing my mind to wander. Who knows what wonderful places it will lead?

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July 4, 2019 – July 4, 2019

It is an occasion worthy of a national celebration. The date at the beginning of the Declaration of Independence is July 4, 1776, 243 years ago. The date does not tell the entire story. It was actually July 2nd that the Continental Congress voted in favor of independence. The delegates from the 13 colonies adopted the Declaration of Independence two days later on July 4. The day has been celebrated ever since as the anniversary of American independence.

Our mode of celebration, with parades, fireworks, concerts and picnics is more the product of the 20th century than the 18th century. The official designation of July 4 as a federal holiday in the United States dates only to 1941. Prior to that the holiday was more informal and based in individual communities and families. Popular ways of acknowledging the holiday in the early days included bonfires, the firing of cannons and muskets and public readings of the Declaration of Independence. George Washington issued double rations of rum to his soldiers in 1778 and again in 1781.

John Adams, one of the five people appointed to draft the Declaration of Independence, believed that the correct date for the celebration of the birth of American independence was July 2. Throughout his life, he turned down invitations to appear at July 4 events in protest of what he saw as the wrong choice of dates.

Regardless of your opinion about the date for the celebration, a debate that seems moot in the light of present traditions and the existence of the official federal holiday, the document that was drafted is indeed remarkable and worthy of our attention.

The committee appointed to draft the document was made up of Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, John Adams of Massachusetts, Roger Sherman of Connecticut, Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania and Robert Livingston of New York. Most historians agree that the actual document was largely written by Jefferson.

I've been thinking about appropriate ways to celebrate the holiday this year. Our family got together for a summer visit before the holiday, the dates chosen so that we could take our grandchildren to grand camp. So our house is empty today - just the two of us. As I age, I find that I am a bit less enthusiastic about crowds and am less inclined to attend parades and other gatherings. We'll cook outdoors and have a good meal, but that is often the case in our household in the summer. We are taking a day off from the usual routines of work, but household chores will beckon and we've plenty to do.

I might tune in to the "A Capitol Fourth" concert on PBS that airs at 6 pm in our time zone. I'm not too impressed with what I have so far read about the Washington DC parade and military flyover. I know that President Trump has wanted a huge military parade, in part inspired by such events in other countries, but I associate such events with countries with less democratic governments. Images of Soviet-era May Day

parades come to my mind. Furthermore, it has long been the case that the official government and military leaders fail to understand that the next war will be significantly different from the previous war. Displaying the weapons of former times have little bearing on present threats. Tanks, ships and airplanes are the weapons of former times. A cyber war, with attacks on the stock market, power grid, communications and banking will have a distinctly different set of tools. We've already seen an attack on the process of free and fair elections. The attackers didn't use tanks or airplanes. Enemies are far more difficult to identify in the warfare of the 21st century than was the case a century ago.

It's hard to make a parade out of the defensive weapons of the 21st century.

I'm not too impressed by the official parade and ceremonies this year.

I did begin my morning by re-reading the Declaration of Independence. It is good to remember the words that inspired a nation to rise up and form itself from under the oppressions of European colonization.

For whatever reason, I never memorized the beginning of the Declaration in the same way that I memorized the preamble to the Constitution. The declaration begins with a long run-on sentence that makes up an entire paragraph:

“When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.”

That's a mouthful!

The next line is the one we all memorized: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Of course the founders of our nation were human. They held lofty ideals, and they also failed to live up to those ideals. The writers of the declaration were themselves slaveholders. They failed personally to acknowledge the truth of their words, “that all men are created equal.” We continue to struggle with equal access to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Nonetheless the ideals set forth by our founding documents are worthy of our attention. The fact that we still struggle to make the words come true in our common life is a sign that there is still work to do.

Laying aside the long list of complaints against the King which makeup the substance of the declaration, I am once again struck by the ending of the document: “And for the

support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.”

You don't see politicians risking their personal fortunes these days. Getting elected seems to be a pretty good way of increasing one's fortunes. And political leaders have always been more willing to risk the lives of young soldiers than their own. As to sacred honor, I'll leave it to Divine Providence to judge the genuineness of commitment.

Happy Birthday to our country! It is a day worthy of our recognition and contemplation of the ideals, some of which remain unachieved, with which we were founded.

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July 5, 2019 – Humility

Annette Gordon-Reed is a professor of legal history at Harvard University and the author of two books on Thomas Jefferson: “the Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family,” and “Most Blessed of the Patriarchs: Thomas Jefferson and the Empire of the Imagination.” She was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for the first title. She opened the eyes of many of us to the incredible complexity of the life of Thomas Jefferson.

My high school American History notion of Jefferson included more than a small amount of hero worship. I knew that he was an owner of slaves, but I also was taught that he freed his slaves upon his death. And more than that I was taught about his role in the writing of the Declaration of Independence and the founding of our nation. The third President of the United States found just the right words to boldly declare the principles of American democracy to the world and at the same time to rally the citizens of the colonies to bold - and life threatening - action. The Declaration of Independence presented a series of indictments against King George III that justified the actions of the colonists. If the Declaration were written in today's style, there would be 27 bullet points alleging acts of infamy and tyranny on the part of the king.

Gordon-Reed's book, however, demonstrates that Jefferson, like all human beings was a complex person with both positive and negative qualities. He may have had big ideas - capable of inspiring a nation 243 years later. But he also took advantage of his slaves and engaged in relationships that we would not consider to be consensual or moral.

I walk along the President's walk at Mount Rushmore and I look up at the four presidents carved into the mountain and I know that the emotions I feel are more complex than a simple rush of patriotism. These great men, worthy of the sculptor's efforts, were flawed. They were human.

We are all complex persons. When we feel that we are able to sum up the personality of any other person, the one thing of which we can be sure is that there is more to the

story. We are all multifaceted persons motivated by many different emotions, goals, relationship and values.

Our faith teaches us the different between heroes and idols. Idols teach us what we can never become. They stand above mere humans. They rise above humanity. Idols demand our adoration, affection and loyalty. And they steal loyalty from the one true God. Heroes on the other hand, show us what we can become. Since the days of his rise to the office of President of the United States Abraham Lincoln has been a demonstration that one can rise from simple and humble beginnings to assume leadership and become a unifier of the people. Leadership does not come from the cost of one's education or the wealth of one's parents, but rather from integrity and faithfulness.

As I celebrated Independence Day yesterday and as I took my grandchildren to Mount Rushmore a few days earlier I was struck that one of the essential qualities of democracy that isn't commonly discussed in our day is humility.

Our political system is not set up to reward humility. Politicians don't win elections by admitting their failings. Democracy, however, is dependent upon the humility of our leaders. Leaders who lack humility quickly become the very despots and tyrants that resemble in many ways the very King George against whom our founding document so powerfully rallies. Instead of living out the values of the Declaration of Independence, those who feel that they are entitled to positions of power and authority become the very persons against whom that document was crafted.

Without humility, there is no democracy.

So when I pray for our leaders, which I do every day, I pray that they will discover the humility to admit their mistakes and to understand that only God is all powerful. Any illusions of power that they now hold are temporary at best and dangerous at worst. May God grant them health and wisdom, strength and humility for the positions they hold.

Centuries from now, historians will write about the complex personalities of our Representatives, Senators and Presidents. I suspect that the scandals that surround them will be no less galling than the things that have been revealed about our founders. I am confident that someone will follow in the steps of Annette Gordon-Reed to uncover and teach future generations about the failings of today's leaders. And when our great-great-grandchildren read their words they will likely wonder about us. "What were they thinking?" "Why didn't they say something?"

Democracy demands humility of everyday citizens as well as of our leaders.

We, too, make mistakes. We, too, need to be willing to humbly admit our failings and shortcomings and then get up and go to work to make our world better.

Back in 2016, coal mines near Gillette, Wyoming laid off more than 460 workers touching off economic shock waves that resounded through out the Powder River Basin. Although not a major factor in that fall's election, the candidate who was elected promised to return jobs to the coal mines. But that promise was one that could not be kept. On Monday, the Eagle Butte And Bell Ayr mines near Gillette sent home all of their workers. The fourth- and sixth- largest producing coal mines in the nation have sent home more than 700 workers without warning. Pay checks are bouncing. Pension payments are not being made. Workers are wondering where to get grocery money. The owner of the mines, Blackjewel, is the fifth coal producer in Wyoming to file for bankruptcy in recent years. The promises made to those who work in the mines simply were not kept.

I don't expect apologies. I do expect, however, that the 2020 election will see a lot less talk about coal and the miners whose lives depend on the work. Humility and truth-telling don't seem to be the route chosen in the pursuit of votes.

The good, hard-working people who have lost their jobs don't expect an apology, which is probably a good thing because I don't expect that they'll get one. Imagine how much stronger our democracy would be if they received one accompanied by affordable health care and a method of retraining for more stable jobs. May we all learn humility for the sake of future generations of citizens of our country.

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July 6, 2019 – Contrasts

There have been a number of articles recently about the demise of Mad magazine. I used to occasionally buy an over-the-counter copy of the magazine and read it. I like the comic book-like format and there were some very good drawings and insightful social satire in the magazine. But it isn't one of the magazines that I every good into reading each issue. There are a few of them. For more than 25 years, I kept every copy of National Geographic Magazine, all organized in slipcases, so that I could refer back to prior issues. Add that to the copies that our mother kept and we had over 50 years of the magazine. Then, one day, I was able to purchase digital copies of the magazine - the entire publication run - on CDs. I bought a set. I found out that no one really needed old copies of the magazine. Libraries, even jails, had sets of copies. I was fortunate when I took them to the church rummage sale that they were able to find a buyer and they escaped being taken to the paper recycler, which was the fate of many years of the Experimental Aviation Association magazine that I had also kept.

These days we don't get too many magazines at our house. Several magazines are enjoyed regularly in their online format. I've decided to let subscription after subscription go and engaged online subscriptions at a fraction of the cost. There are, however, two magazines that I still receive in paper form at my house. Both have to do with boats and building boats. They are very different sorts of magazines. *Wooden Boat* is a slick, full color magazine published six times a year. The July/August issue is number 269. The magazine is in its 45th year of publication. It once was a more humble journal, appealing to those who built and restored wooden boats. Over the years, it has focused on larger and larger boats and projects that are more and more expensive. Occasionally they will carry an article about a canoe or kayak or a small rowboat, but those articles are often about custom tenders that are made for larger and more expensive boats. Reading the magazine is, for me, an exercise in fantasy. The boats about which I am reading represent projects that are beyond my means. Even the advertisements in the magazine are for products that I will probably never buy. I buy varnish by the pint, or occasionally a quart, and never by the gallon. The ads for boats at the end of the magazine include multiple-million dollar yachts and projects that would require a semi truck to move. Classic bronze castings and hand-carved wooden pulleys are beautiful and important for a historically-accurate ship recreation, but beyond the means of a person like myself.

I have considered letting my subscription to the magazine go, but have hung on for the occasional article that intrigues me and the occasional advertisement for a product that I might actually use. It is also a good way to keep up on technological developments in wooden boat preservation and building.

The other magazine I receive is published monthly and is just a slight step above a newsletter. It is printed on copy paper, just like our church newsletter, and has the same format. It is a bit larger, with 64 pages each month. There are no color photographs and no slick, professionally laid out pages. In its place are substantive articles with good information and a few photographs that are worthy of study. There are quirky columnists who are trying to build and restore boats with tiny budgets and lots of used parts. There are designs of boats that an amateur could build with a hobbyist's budget. I read that magazine from cover to cover every month. I write thank-you letters each year when I send in my check to renew my subscription. As opposed to the other magazine, where subscribing and renewing is an online process, this one still operates with a renewal reminder letter and my sending a check by return post.

The contrast between the two magazines has been in my head the last couple of days simply because I've been reading both at the same time. I have one in one location in my home and the other in another and I pick up one and read an article or two and then put it down. The next time I might pick up the other.

The magazines reflect a lot of what I see going on in our communities these days. I watch, as I drive around town, custom home builders create huge structures that seem

to have few budget limitations. I visit folks who live in modest homes and who struggle to keep them maintained enough to have dry basements and roofs that don't leak. The contrast is very evident. The cost of new home construction has tripled in the last 15 years in our town. There are plenty of people who are being left behind because of those costs. Much of what is being bought with that extra money is more house. Three car garages are becoming common. A builder told me that the number of bathrooms per house is the number of bedrooms plus one. Master suites now not only have private baths, but the bathrooms have vanities with multiple sinks. Mood lighting, built-in vacuum systems, high-end kitchen appliances. All of those things cost money.

At the same time, we have plenty of people living in poverty and substandard housing in our town. It isn't just the homeless who experience the crisis. There are three and four families packed into houses designed for a single family. There are children who don't sleep in the same bed every night and who often don't sleep in a bed at all.

I'm probably going to let the subscription to the color magazine go. It is an expense I can avoid. I can occasionally access a copy of the magazine online. But I have no intention of dropping the inexpensively-produced magazine right now. It is the journal of my people. I've become comfortable with the folks who make do, use repurposed junk, and pursue their interests without excess funding. None of my boats will ever become museum pieces, but we sure have a lot of fun playing in the water.

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July 7, 2019 – Changing Times

I've never been what one would describe as a big sports fan. I enjoy watching games, especially when I know some of the players. I've attended my share of high school sports events and cheered for local teams. I've been to a few professional baseball games. I've watched my share of college and professional basketball on television. I know enough about hockey to enjoy a game from time to time. And I learned some of the rules of soccer when our children participated in youth games. I am not opposed to sports, but it hasn't been the focus of my life.

Years ago, when we were serving our first parish, the playoff games leading up to the super bowl were generally held on Sunday mornings and I'd try to check the score between the two church services that we led so that I could engage in intelligent conversation with church members during the coffee hour following worship. I remember one time that I checked the score just before going into the pulpit and part way through the service, when I was making announcements, I announced the score. A church member updated my announcement, saying that one of the teams had just scored another time. He received quite a bit of teasing about listening to his radio during the worship service.

Having had that experience, I wonder if there will be anyone who will be checking the score on the Women's World Cup match this morning. The Match begins at 9 a.m. local time and our worship service starts at 9:30. With cell phones and wi-fi in our sanctuary, it would be pretty easy for someone to keep up with the game. Since I'm really not that big of a fan, I won't mind waiting until after worship to check up on the match.

It has been interesting to witness the rise in the popularity of soccer over the span of the last couple of decades. Most pundits agree that the US Women's team is more popular and better known than the Men's team. The success of the women, which includes three World Cup championships and could well include a fourth after today, has been impressive.

In general organized sports seem to have become a higher priority for many people than once was the case. 35 years ago a youth in our church was faced with a difficult decision. He wanted to attend a church youth rally, but doing so would mean missing a key practice for his football team. He spoke with the coach about his dilemma, but got no hope. "If you miss the practice," the coach informed him, "you won't be suiting up for the game." He was a key member of the team. His teammates counted on him. But he also really wanted to participate in the youth event. I tried to figure out an accommodation, but waiting until after the practice would mean that the entire youth group would miss out on the opening events of the rally. I spoke to the coach, but he offered no compromise. In the end the youth missed the practice and went to the church youth rally. The coach backed down. He needed the player to win the game.

That wouldn't happen today. Youth sports, especially soccer, demand a higher level of commitment from players than church activities. I can't remember another case of a youth choosing church over sports in my entire career. And the youth in our church have the support of their families in making such decisions. When soccer or volleyball or other sports conflict with church, virtually all of the families with youth in our church will choose sports over church activities.

I believe it is a reflection of the role of religion in the wider culture. People don't put the institutional church and its regular services very high on their list of priorities. They will attend when it is convenient, but they don't worry about missing when there is something else to do.

Because I have lived in the church all of my life and made church the center of all of my activities, I don't really understand the thinking of folks. Nonetheless, I have been called to serve those very people who have different priorities than mine.

Of course the World Cup is being played in France, where the time is eight hours ahead of Rapid City. It will be 5 pm in France when the game begins. Still, I suspect that for the players and fans, the match is the big event of their days. I doubt if any have made plans to attend church before heading to the game.

Like it or not we have to learn to serve people in the midst of the lives that they lead. I've learned to pay attention to sports and sports schedules because those things are important to the people I serve.

We kick off our big week tomorrow with Vacation Bible School at our church. That program has changed greatly over the years as well. For many years we have been holding an evening program, starting with a supper meal and running our program to 8 pm. The main reason for shifting away from daytime programs is the issue of recruiting volunteers. We could get plenty of children during the day, but the more children, the more volunteers it takes to staff the program. Several of the churches in our community have gone to paid staff, hiring the staff of church camps and YouthWorks and other service groups to staff their VBS programs. We have remained with volunteers from our church. So our program runs evenings. A few years ago we shortened our program by one day because attendance was so light on Friday evening. We couldn't really run our program with most of the children and volunteers gone. And you can bet that the folks who are not available on Friday won't be coming back for church on Sunday morning, either. So we try to run the best four day program we can.

We could spend our time complaining about how much things have changed, and I guess this journal entry is doing just that, but we are called to service in the midst of the realities of our time. Who knows what the church will look like 20 or 30 years from now? It will be different. May we continue to be faithful as we change with the times.

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July 8, 2019 – Televangelists and Politicians

Back in 1989, Oral Roberts told the viewers of his television show, "Oral Roberts Presents" that God was going to "call him home" if he didn't raise \$8 million. He climbed up into what he called his prayer tower and fasted. Whether or not it was a stunt, it worked. He raised the money and he didn't die. He lived to the end of his life, when he passed away at age 91 in 2009. Roberts was one of the pioneers and masters of using the media of television to reach millions of people with what was a combination of a message of faith healing and a kind of prosperity gospel.

I don't mean to attack the man, but I have some doubts about his message. I don't think that God evaluates success or failure in terms of specific amounts of money. I think there was some exaggeration in Roberts' claim that a 900 foot tall Jesus appeared to him and ordered him to raise \$120 million. I don't think Jesus works that way. I don't think Roberts was capable of accurately estimating the height of 900 feet. I don't think faith and money are connected in the same way that he seemed to believe. I didn't send in a donation in exchange for holy water that, if sprinkled on one's wallet, would bring prosperity.

I believe that Roberts had genuine faith. And I think that many of the people who watched his television show were able to grow in faith despite some of Roberts' quirks. And I do believe that Roberts is deserving of our compassion because of the tragedies he experienced in his life. He grew up in poverty and his obsession with money was likely a response to the harshness of his early years. He suffered from tuberculosis as a child and the process of his recovery of his health taught him some real lessons about faith. His family suffered the tragic death of his son Roland after years of suffering with addictions. His life wasn't easy.

And his 1989 temper tantrum in front of God is reminiscent of Biblical leaders. Elijah laid down in the wilderness prepared to die when Jezebel's henchmen were hunting for him after the slaying of her priests. He was ready to just give up and end it all. Jonah had a similar temper tantrum before God when God showed mercy and spared Nineveh from destruction. So, in a way Oral Roberts was in good company.

It didn't make his stunt seem any less childish. It didn't mean that God was the source of all of the money that Roberts raised over the years. Roberts was a master of raising money and no small amount of the money raised came from people who had very little money themselves. Roberts' and his family lived lavish lifestyles with trips on private jets, shopping sprees in expensive clothing stores, and more. According to a 2007 lawsuit, Roberts, son Richard and his family used funds raised for Oral Roberts University for 11 home remodeling jobs in 14 years, lavish shopping sprees and multiple trips on private jets.

I don't understand how people of faith can justify such behaviors. But such justifications aren't limited to Oral Roberts. In general, Evangelical church leaders, who were for the most part filled with righteous indignation when President Clinton abused his position to pursue illicit affairs, seem to have a different perspective on President Trump. His multiple marriages and well-documented affairs don't seem to be a problem when it comes to their endorsements or embrace of his actions as president. I don't understand how people of faith can justify turning away refugees or family separation policies or keeping immigrants in cages. To me their behavior is reminiscent of the behavior of church leaders in Germany during the Nazi regime.

But somehow people of faith frequently are blinded to their own actions and words. Out of good faith they engage in practices and behaviors that seem to be so far from God's call. You don't have to be a biblical scholar to interpret the Bible's words on immigration. It is a major theme. Just read the book of Isaiah and you'll find that the failure to offer welcome to refugees and immigrants stands in direct contrast to God's law. But religious leaders in America today are preaching to their congregations, "Build the wall." They speak of the president as God's gift to America with absolutely uncritical words and actions.

This journal has not focused on politics. I'm no expert in policy or in government and I've tried to stay away from the subject. But I do write about religion and I do pay attention to what other religious leaders do. And I see great contrasts between biblical faith and teaching and the words and actions of some who claim to be religious leaders.

I am certainly not in the class with the major televangelists. I don't command millions of viewers. I'm a simple pastor in a congregation that counts its numbers in the hundreds. We have a tiny budget buy comparison with many other churches. But I do feel deep responsibility to be careful with the gifts of our donors. I am very careful with making appeals for funds. I do believe that the community should be in charge of discerning God's will and making decisions about how to manage church finances. I know that all of us are prone to confuse what we want with God's will. We need other faithful people to help us discern God's call.

Oral Roberts was not God. The President is not God. They are human. They are worthy of compassion and concern and care. I would advise prayer and study before sending a check to either. It is no mistake that the 10 commandments begin with strict advice about mistaking the wrong person or item for God. There is only one God and those who would live lives of freedom need to be careful to avoid false Gods.

My advice to faithful people is to take the words of religious leaders with a grain of salt. We are human. We are prone to mistakes and misstatements. I suppose that applies to this journal as much as it does to the fund-raising appeals of the televangelists.

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July 9, 2019 – The Bible and Kings

I can remember the Sunday School stories we heard about Solomon. He was king over Israel after David and in our stories he was reported to be a very wise man. He solved a dispute between two mothers over a child. When both mothers claimed that the child was theirs, he threatened to cut the child in half. The mother of the child relented in honor of the thought revealing the other woman to not be the true mother. I never questioned the story, wondering what kind of terrible person would agree to cutting a child in half. The "false" mother in the story must have been strange indeed.

What they didn't teach in my Sunday School classes was the brutal nature of Solomon's consolidation of his reign. Solomon becomes the successor to David in no small part through the manipulations and conniving of his mother Bathsheba. And once he becomes king, he rules with an iron fist. 1 Kings 2 reports that he arranges to have his brother Adonijah put to death to remove him as a threat to his authority. He also informed the priest Abiathar that he deserved to die, but instead of killing him, Solomon banishes the priest to Anathoth.

To really understand the dynamics of kingship in Israel, it is a good idea to go back to the beginnings of monarchy in that nation. When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. But his sons did not rule fairly. Then the elders of Israel came to Samuel and asked him to appoint a king for them. Samuel prayed to God and God said, "Don't worry, the people aren't rejecting you, they're rejecting me. Rejecting God is never a good idea. It is idolatry pure and simple. So God instructs Samuel to warn the people of the dangers of having a king. Samuel tells the people:

"These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day."

The people don't listen, God relents, and they get the monarchy. (1 Samuel 8) It is not a pretty picture and the story is presented in the historical books of the bible as a cautionary tale of the dangers of monarchy and the problems of people who celebrate human leaders instead of turning their attention to God.

Back to Solomon and that banished priest. The priest does go to Anathoth and we don't hear from him or from Anathoth for more than three centuries. We begin to read the story of the prophet Jeremiah. His book begins, "The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. Hmm . . . Anathoth, Anathoth, where have I heard that name before? Ah yes! The prophet Jeremiah is a descendent of the very priest banned by Solomon. And if you read the book of Jeremiah, you will discover that the very presence of the monarchy in Israel is named as the reason for its fall. Israel loses its wealth, its might and its position among the nations because of immoral behavior, corrupt kings and people who forgot that God, not human rulers, is in charge of the world. Jeremiah is the Bible's leading critic of the rule of Solomon.

The problem is that many people, like my Sunday School curriculum writers, read only some of the verses of the bible. Presenting stories of Solomon out of context can lead to a completely opposite understanding of the role of the kings in Biblical literature. Kings, even those anointed by the servants and priests of God, are the expressions of Israel's lack of faith in God, not Israel's faithfulness. Solomon, even though he was wise and rich and powerful, led the people astray from the mercy, justice and love to which they

had been called by God. The eventual result was defeat and exile. The central story of Hebrew Biblical history is not the rise of the kings, but the exile of the people. If you don't read the whole story, you can't get the whole picture.

Unfortunately our time is marked by many preachers who seem to be hung up on their select few verses and who never get around to telling the big picture story. This is due, in no small part, to Christian religious traditions that do not insist on educated clergy. Appointing teachers of the bible who themselves have not engaged in serious disciplined study of the texts is a dangerous proposition. If you mistake what someone says the bible means for what it really means, you can get a false picture. Just because someone is quoting the bible to you does not mean that he or she is being faithful to biblical teachings.

One of the reasons that the Bible is so critical to our people is that it teaches lessons that we seem to need to learn over and over and over again.

My advice to Sunday School teachers and all who seek to know the truth is to reject the notion of just telling a few stores. If you want to teach about Solomon, read all of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings before you begin your lesson plan.

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July 10, 2019 – Telling the Stories

i've been helping to lead Vacation Bible School for decades. Over the years, I've had many different jobs in the program. I've helped with games, assisted with crafts and led mission centers. I've led songs, taken photos and helped to serve meals. But hands down, my favorite role in Vacation Bible School is the one I have this year: storyteller. I love to tell stories. And I love to tell stories to children.

Here are my credentials as a storyteller:

- I have a seminary degree and I've invested a lifetime in bible study, so I know the stories pretty well.
- I was a staff writer for the Vacation Bible School curriculum "The Storyteller Series." I attended writer's conferences and my contributions were published in curricula that was sold throughout the English-speaking part of the world.
- My grandson once told my wife, "I think that grown ups with beards are the best story readers." His father does not have a beard, nor does his other grandfather, so I was the only one present who qualified.
- My granddaughter recently responded to my wife when she asked who should read stories, "I go up to grandpa!"

I've never been very good at doing voices that sound like actual characters, but I have quite a bit of vocal variation and my grandchildren think I do a pretty good Cookie Monster and an acceptable Grover for Sesame Street stories.

Storytelling is a skill that requires practice and honing. I've invested years in listening to preachers and storytellers and analyzing the difference between the written word and the spoken word. Writing requires some skill at self-editing. We often use too many words in our writing and learning to cull unnecessary words is a key to good writing. But good writing doesn't mean that the document will be interesting when spoken out loud. While sparse language can be dramatic when reading out loud - think of poetry - there is room for more repetition and verbal flourishes when speaking out loud. Most importantly, when speaking out loud, rhythm and pitch are essential in keeping your audience interested and engaged. A good preacher or storyteller learns to look directly into the faces of the listeners and respond to their reactions to the story. You can speed up or slow down the pace in response to the listeners. You can raise or lower both pitch and volume to create interest and variety in your speech. Those adjustments require years of practice. I've delivered a lot of sermons in front of a mirror and even more in an empty church building. I still run through my sermons in the empty church early on Sunday morning each week. I do the same with the stories for the children in Vacation Bible School.

Our Vacation Bible School is only four nights long this year, so I am at the halfway mark. I've told two of the focus stories of our program and I have two more presentations left to make. Last night after I had told the story and as I began to focus on how I will tell tonight's story, the hymn with words by Katherine Hankey came to my mind:

I love to tell the story
Of unseen things above
Of Jesus and his glory
Of Jesus and his love

I love to tell the story
Because I know 'tis true
It satisfies my longings
As nothing else can do

I love to tell the story
'Twill be my theme in glory
To tell the old, old story
Of Jesus and his love

I love to tell the story
For those who know it best

Seem hungering and thirsting
To hear it like the rest

And when in scenes of glory
I sing the new, new song
'Twill be the old, old story
That I have loved so long

I love to tell the story
'Twill be my theme in glory
To tell the old, old story
Of Jesus and his love
To tell the old, old story
Of Jesus and his love

In the corner of the tradition where I grew up, the hymn is sung at a reasonably slow pace. We don't rush it when we are singing it. And we sing the chorus after every verse.

There are a few things about my work that are less pleasant for me. I'm not excited about supervising contractors or debugging the computer network. I wish the church had enough money to just hire someone else to install the extension it needs to make the wireless network function properly. I'm no fan of making reports to the denomination. I get snowed by the mountains of emails and other communications. Some days I am less than creative in my responses to the many appeals for money that come my way.

But I love to baptize children. I feel like leading funerals is a distinct honor. I am always ready to offer a prayer or table grace at any occasion. And I love to tell stories from the Bible just like the song says.

I don't remember too many details from being a student in Vacation Bible School when I was a child. I know that we participated every year. I know that our mother was a frequent volunteer leader. I remember some of the other teachers with their different styles. I remember the picnic at the end of VBS. I remember having games in the park. I also can tell you several stories that I learned in Vacation Bible School. They were mostly narrative stories with strong characters. Those are the easiest stories to tell. Some of them are repeated in all four gospels. Beyond all of that, however, what I remember is that we were welcomed into the church and surrounded by adults who really cared about us.

That's the message I try to convey in Vacation Bible School: "You are welcome and loved in this place." I hope that message comes through the stories and games and crafts and mission projects, so that one day in the future, when each individual needs it

most, she or he will remember VBS and return to the church for love and care and support.

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July 11, 2019 – Meetings

Dear readers: Once again we will be traveling this summer. We love to travel, but when you make long journeys they involve time zones and sometimes inconsistent access to the Internet. We will be traveling through some remote country at the beginning of our trip and later flying to Japan. That means that although I will continue to write daily journal posts, they may not appear on the Internet in the regular way that occurs when I am at home. You can also check out the Adventures of Edward Bear which will be updated for each new location we visit. Thanks for your patience.

Working with groups of people is one of the joys and one of the challenges of the life of a pastor. I am firmly convinced that the work of the church is always better when conducted by groups of people. The tasks of discipleship are simply too big for individuals. We are called as a community and we are called to community. That means that we, who are called to the pastoral role, must invest significant time and energy in building up the community. And that means a lot of meetings.

In our congregation we cut down on the number of meetings in the summer, but there are some groups that simply need to meet regularly and who can't take a summer break. Our Department of Stewardship and Budget meets every month to review the church financial statements, monitor expenses and plan for upcoming programs and projects. Today will be my last day in the office until after our vacation, but it will be a long day with plenty of meetings. In addition to Vacation Bible School which has its concluding session this evening, I have four meetings today. The first begins at 8 am and the last is over the dinner hour, so for a while this evening I will be going back and forth between my duties as Vacation Bible School storyteller and pastor at a finance meeting.

Some days it seems like my life simply has too many meetings. Over the years I have participated in a lot of reconfigurations, downsizings, and tar-thinkings of how congregations organize themselves for their work. Each time we take about having fewer meetings, meetings that are more focused and decreasing the need for so many members to serve on boards and committees. Each time that happens it seems like the congregation finds ways to make things more complex. Back in 1998, after a multi-year study, our congregation voted a new congregation with four departments reflecting the five priorities of our congregation: Worship, Education, Mission and Pastoral Care. Each department would have six members. Before that new constitution had been in place for a full year, amendments were proposed to increase the number of departments and the number of people on the departments. The natural progression of any organization, it seems, is to get more people involved in structures that increase in complexity.

In each generation there are a few church leaders who really love meetings. It has been interesting to watch the different styles of church leaders over the years. Some are quick to appoint new task forces and committees. Others try to avoid adding meetings to the already full schedule. Some are careful about minutes and agendas and try to keep meetings focused and on task. Others are less so. Most active church members have experienced meetings where the work is done and the meeting over in a few minutes and other meetings that stretch on and on for hours accomplishing the same amount or less work than a quick 10-minute meeting can do.

I don't know how many times, over the years, that I've been at a meeting that had a small task and where the work was done in a few minutes, but the members lingered and talked. It is a rare church meeting that actually results in the room being empty of people in less than an hour.

If you do the math, four meetings today means that if I worked an 8-hour day, half of my time would be in meetings. It doesn't really work that way because my days are generally longer than 8 hours and definitely so during Vacation Bible School and some of my meetings will overlap and run into other meetings. Still, a significant percentage of my time is spent in meetings.

Another thing that often occurs in the church is that there will be a few folks who are focused on only one task. A particular meeting may be the most important event of their day. They come focused on what they want to accomplish and sometimes are unaware that others have a lot more things going on in their lives. Having only one meeting in a day is such a rare occurrence for me that I sometimes forget that the person who keeps talking and talking is at their sole social event of the day. They are lonely and need to spend time with others.

I know this journal entry contains a lot of complaining, but I don't mean to do so. Committees and groups are essential to the life of the church. We are in the business of building community and community forms when we work together. I am not opposed to meetings. I convene a fair amount of them myself. I do, however, want to keep the purpose of each meeting clear so that people feel that the time they invest in group work is a good use of their time. Our members are generous with their time and as stewards, we are called to not waste that generosity.

So I will pray for a bit of patience and be prepared for more meetings. then I'll head out on vacation and have a short time without meetings. By the time the vacation is over, I'll be ready to dive back in and attend a few more meetings. Perhaps I should pray for a bit of grace and compassion for others while I'm at it.

July 12, 2019 – Patrick Anthony Calabrese



Dear Patrick,

Welcome to this world! Of course you are not ready to read this letter and you and I have not yet met face to face, but you will soon know me and one day you will read the letter I wrote to you on the day of your birth, just like I have written to each of your Huffman cousins on the day they were born.

A lot of people all around the world have been waiting eagerly for this day. A lot of people are very, very glad that you have been born. You come from a very long line of people who have prayed and worked and longed for children to be born. Some day your parents can tell you the stories of your grandparents on both sides of your family and how we prayed and longed for children in our lives and how important those children have become in our family story. But longing for children didn't begin with your grandparents. There are many others, throughout long generations of our people who have felt the deep longing for children.

What you need to know is that we are all celebrating your birth with all we have in us. We are excited and delighted and we can't wait to meet you and hold you in our arms.

You are a child of the world. It is a pretty special thing to be born a citizen of the United States who took his first breaths in Japan. At the time you were born, you were living so far from our home that it was still the day before your birthday when we found out. That's very confusing, even to your grandparents, but time is not exactly the same in every part of the world. I am pretty sure that you will travel farther and faster in the first couple of years of your life than I did in the first half of mine. As you travel, you will discover that this world is an amazing and wonderful place with so many beautiful things to see, so many wonderful people to meet and so many opportunities to grow that you will never have to be worried about new things to do and see.

I hope that all of your life people will tell you how much you are loved. You have been born into a family that is not rich in material things, but very rich in love. The legacy of love into which you have been born is a very wonderful blessing.

One day I hope that I can tell you about the day that I held your mother for the very first time. She was a little bit older than you will be when I hold you for the first time, but she was a tiny baby - even smaller than you are. And, as you know, she grew up to become an amazing and wonderful woman and you are very lucky to have her for your mother. When I tell you that story, I'll also suggest that you ask your Grandpa and Grandma Calabrese about the first time they got to hold your father. It is an amazing and wonderful story as well.

There are a lot of stories that I can't wait to tell you. In time you will meet your cousins. You already have three cousins on your mother's side: Elliot, Emmala and Eliza. Did you notice that they all have names that start with "E"? You are the first of our

grandchildren to have a name starting with “P”. It is just a symbol of how special you are. And, on your father’s side, you don’t yet have any cousins. You are the very first grandchild born to your Calabrese grandparents. You are the one who made your parents what they are. Before you were born, your father was not yet a father and your mother was not yet a mother and your Calabrese grandparents were not yet grandparents. You made all of them what they are. And you have made Grandma Susan and I grandparents of a boy born in Japan. We’ve never been that before. So you can see, your coming to our family is a very special event and you have a very special place in the hearts of all of your family.

On your birthday, your Grandma and I are in South Dakota, which is a very long way from Misawa, Japan where you were born. So while we waited, I went into a guest bedroom in our house to think and on the wall was a picture of your grandma Susan when she was a baby. There is a picture of me when I was a baby too. You’ll never know us as babies. Neither did your mother. We will always be old people to you. And I want you to know that being old is not a bad thing at all. Everyone gets older and you will become old one day. But that is a very long time from now and many things will happen between now and then. In the old days when we had our pictures taken, there was no way to see an instant picture by using a phone or a computer. The pictures made of us had to be processed in a lab and it took quite a bit of time for them to be ready to be seen. The world has changed a lot since back then. It will change even more in your lifetime. Your old grandpa can’t quite imagine all of the wonderful things you will see and do.

So welcome to this world! Welcome to our family! We are so very happy that you are here. Now, no matter what happens we will all know that love is stronger than the longest distance in all of the universe. Love is stronger than anything. You, dear Patrick, are a gift of love and we are so grateful for that gift.

Love,
Grandpa Ted

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July 13, 2019 – Going Home

My mother grew up at Fort Benton, Montana. After graduating from high school, she attended nursing school at Deaconess Hospital in Billings. It was at Billings that she met my father. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps when the war broke out and she went on the train by herself to California where they were married. After the war and my father’s discharge, they lived briefly in Oklahoma where my father earned his Airframe and Engine Maintenance Certificates so that he could do certified aircraft maintenance. There are a lot of stories about their adventures finding a place to settle, but eventually that location was Big Timber, Montana.

Big Timber is a little over 200 miles from Fort Benton where our mother's parents lived. As soon as they could afford a car they began to make the trip on a regular basis. By the time I came into the family, her mother had passed away, but there were still all kinds of family business in Fort Benton. Gradually over the next few years, the family focus shifted from Fort Benton to the farm at Floweree where my mom's sister lived with her husband and where her parents and grandparents had homesteaded years before.

We made the trip to the ranch over and over again. At the time a 200 mile trip was a most of the day adventure. We'd pack our things, including a lunch into the car and head north out of town. After traveling through Harlowtown and Judith Gap we'd start looking for Eddie's Corner. The truck stop wasn't much like modern facilities. There was no convenience store and the trucks parked on a gravel and dirt pad next to the station. There were only a couple of trees and mostly it was a place where the wind blew all of the time.

Diesel pumps were on one side of the building and gas pumps on the other. Our car would make it all the way to ranch without needing gas, but with all of us kids we needed a stop as we approached the half way point of our trip. We'd use the rest rooms and eat our picnic lunch. Sometimes we would be treated to a burger or a milkshake, but most trips we'd share a roll of life savers because our parents taught us that you always give some business to the corner when you stop. The one thing I remember about Eddie's Corner from being a kid is that we didn't like the taste of the water there. We were used to water from the mountain creeks at home and the well water was full of minerals and not very good by our standards.

Over the years I spend a bit of time at the corner. Once we waited until nearly midnight for an employee from our shop to arrive with a truck to tow home the truck we were driving after a u-joint broke and we were stranded near Eddie's Corner. The 24-hour cafe was a place to drink coffee and wait for help to arrive. Another time, I was heading home from the ranch with a pickup truck and had changed a flat tire a few miles from the corner and the old mechanic found a used tire for me to use as a spare for the drive home. I'm guessing that the corner no longer has a mechanic on duty at night.

From there it was a quick trip around the Belt Mountains and before long the tall smokestack at Great Falls would come into sight. After Great Falls, which for us was a really big city, it was just a few more miles to the ranch.

The trip took about four hours plus the half hour or more to stop at Eddie's Corner.

These days I live in South Dakota and I don't get to the ranch that often. But we're at Eddie's Corner this morning, having stayed in our camper at a campground with full hook ups right behind the new gas station, restaurant and convenience store. The parking for the trucks is paved and there are some really nice trees and lawns. One of

the big difference is that a 200-mile road trip isn't that big of a deal for me these days. We made over 450 miles yesterday and we didn't get out of town until 11 am. After Vacation Bible School ended Thursday evening, there was a lot to do to get the church ready for the next activities and events. All of the while we were exchanging messages with our daughter who had just had her first baby in Japan. We didn't get to sleep until after midnight and then there was a lot to do to get our house ready for us to be gone for an extended trip and our camper ready to hit the road.

We didn't have any trouble with tires. That is one thing that has really changed over the years. It has been a long time since I've had to change a tire on the road. Tires are much more reliable and the roads are a bit better as well. I'm glad for that because we have eight tires on the road when we are pulling our camper.

Our only adventure of the day was that while we were driving on some really rough road near Lame Deer Montana, a screw came out of a latch for the silverware drawer in the camper. The drawer came all the way out and dumped on the floor. When I checked the camper there was quite a bit of silverware and a few other things we'd tucked into that drawer on the floor. I got to wash all of our silverware when we stopped for the night.

My home is now in South Dakota, but every trip to Montana, especially those that take us to familiar places, still feels like coming home. This trip is a bittersweet one for me because the reason for the rush is that this morning we'll attend the Celebration of Life ceremony for my cousin. He lived all of his life on the ranch and was the one who always welcomed all of the family over and over again. His niece and her family now ranch the land. A new generation has come. But for us oldsters today is a day to remember and reminisce.

Its good to be home.

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July 14, 2019 – At Home in the World



The river ranch sits on the Missouri River between Great Falls and Fort Benton. Family ranch and farm land are on both sides of the river. The land has been certified organic and is managed without the use of chemicals. The hills and breaks and bluffs of the Missouri Valley have been used as rangeland and are home to deer and a host of other critters. It is a beautiful place. My cousin's grandchildren are the sixth generation of our family who have lived on and worked this land.

All land is sacred, endowed by the Creator with properties that support and sustain not only our bodies, but also our spirits. Just visiting the ranch is always a time of renewal for me. Waking up this morning to the prolific birdsong is a special treat for me.

Yesterday a group of a hundred or more people gathered at the ranch to remember my cousin Russ, who lived all of his life on the ranch and whose larger than life personality impacted so many lives. The gathering was an amazingly diverse group of ranchers and organic farmers and scientists and engineers and authors and even a couple of ministers. We had a grand potluck with so much food that there was no way to even sample all of the offerings.



I talked with cousins whom I haven't seen for decades and met a few new folks. We all had stories about Russ. It was interesting to note that each of us had a sense that we had received special treatment from Russ. I had spent two of my teenage summers working with him on the ranch and always felt that whenever I was around, he would drop everything to visit with me. So did my cousins. He had a way of making each person feel welcomed, loved and valued.

After a big meal and lots of visiting a smaller group of us got in our cars and drove down by the river to a place that has been special to a lot of us to visit the gravesite where Russ is buried. Knowing that his body is there in the very soil he loved and tended with the river running by and the sweet sage perfuming the air gave me a deep feeling that this is right. We love the people in our lives and we grieve when they die and we find ways to express our grief while we acknowledge that in God's great creation nothing is wasted. The elements of our bodies are returned to the earth and new life comes forth.

Russ was an unconventional man and so his grave is a bit unconventional as well. In place of a headstone, there is a cairn of rocks. In addition to the native grasses and sage there have been planted a few organic lentils and a bit of purple sage. Some of those who gathered left other small tokens. We sang a few songs. The river kept flowing. The birds kept singing. The wind kept refreshing the countryside.

And then there was more talk. Cousins pondering ideas of the passing of generations, of the simple fact that we are now the elders of our family and that things are changing. New generations have spread out across the world. One piece of geography, though central to our family story, has a different meaning to our grandchildren than it does to us. The places of our childhoods are not the places of our grandchildren. Just like that mighty river that keeps flowing by the ranch, time keeps rolling by. Among the memories and nostalgia were hopes and dreams and a few fears about the future. Some of us are facing some big changes in our lives. Others have already gone through major life transitions. There is a kind of collective wisdom when our family gathers.

Whenever I wake on a Sunday while on vacation there is a moment of disorientation. I wake early on Sundays and am used to starting my day by reviewing my sermon. When I'm on vacation there is no sermon to deliver, and paying too much attention to the texts for the day can cause me to be distracted when I worship in a setting that is different from the congregation I serve. Part of vacation is allowing myself to be present in the moment of the lives and worship styles of others. I'm not the best at not being in charge and vacation is an opportunity to practice a skill that will be increasingly important as the years pass.

The sounds of the morning at the ranch are very good therapy for one who needs to work at the skill and grace of relaxation. The windsong and birdsong combine to refresh my life. It is no mistake that the big commandments of our people start with acknowledging and honoring God and move to learning to relax and giving God the sabbath before turning to the behaviors that sustain community such as honesty and honoring elders and respecting others. There is great wisdom just in the order of the rules we have received for living as a free people.

Today is sabbath. It is a holy day. The congregation that I love is in good hands with capable leadership. I am blessed to be in a place of deep meaning and rich tradition.

In Hebrew, the word for Spirit is the same word that is used for wind and it is the same word that is used for breath. Here in the Missouri breaks, it doesn't take much imagination at all to feel the wind as the breath of God. It is a gift to be able to inhale that wind and feel the presence of the Creator and know that the air we breathe is shared with all of the creatures of this planet. Gratitude comes naturally.

Here I can understand that my elders and those who have gone before are not just in the places where their bodies have been laid to rest, but are a part of something much bigger that is beyond any particular place. That knowledge is something that I will take with me wherever I roam. And, when my time comes to join the elders in the life beyond this one I now know, the location will not be important because truly God is everywhere.

July 15, 2019 – The Places of our Lives



One of the books that I read to our children and have also read to our grandchildren is called "Yertle the Turtle." The story is of a turtle who wants to be king over all kinds of other things, so he keep seeking a higher and higher perch from which to see. The higher he went, the more he could see and the more over which he could claim to be king. He got other turtles to stack themselves upon one another and climbed to the top of the tower, and he demanded that the tower and his position me made higher and higher until the entire tower collapsed and he was once again just a turtle in the mud. It makes a good children's story and it makes a good point about the importance of thinking of others and their feelings.

I was thinking of Yertle the Turtle as we were talking with cousins yesterday. We gathered in the late afternoon to talk about community and about our plans for the future and about lots of other interesting things that cousins talk about when they are together. Enough years have passed and we've gathered for enough funerals that somehow we have become the elders of our family. There are still three generations around after most of the people who came for my cousin's funeral have gone home and we are the oldest of those generations. All of us elders are at points in our lives where we need to make decisions about where and how we will live for the next phase of our lives, so we

talked about places where we might live and how we might form and participate in community as we grow older.

The cousin whose life we celebrated and whose grave we visited this weekend once wrote about his choice of place. He lived all of his life within a few miles of the place where he was born, but he made some decisions about where to locate his house and how he would live, including choosing the place where he would die and be buried. He once wrote an essay in which he said that at one time he thought he would like to live on top of a hill, where he could look around and see for miles and miles. This is very open country. You don't have to be on top of a hill to see for many miles, but when you do crest a hill, the view is truly impressive. You can see mountains in the distance in several different directions and the wheat fields roll on from horizon to horizon. The problem with living on top of the hill, he wrote, is that in order to live there he would have to marry the daughter of the man who owned the top of the hill. That would be acceptable, he surmised, but then you would build your house up there and you would always be looking beyond your own fields and beyond the fields of your neighbors. Instead, he chose to build his home in the bottom land next to the river. He couldn't see the great distances, but over the years he built up his ranch in such a way that he was the owner of all that he could see from his home. He concluded his essay by saying that when he was overwhelmed by the view and the size of the land he could close his shades and limit his view to an even smaller space and feel that he had even more control over what he could see.

I'm not telling my cousin's story very well, but he developed a philosophy that was the opposite of the ill-fated king Yertle of the turtles. My cousin's philosophy proved to be a good way of living and viewing the world.

There are many who would say this particular part of Montana is lonely country, but it has never felt that way to me because it is a place of our ancestors and it is populated by family. There may not be many of them, but they are generous with hospitality and quick to welcome us whenever we visit. I love to come to this part of the world, but it isn't the place where I will be making my home. It was just the right place for my cousin to live and die, but it isn't my place.

One of the stories of our people is of Abraham and Sarah, who lived long lives and grew old together. They were wanderers and nomads, always following the dream of a promise and a land. What they didn't realize, at least in the beginning of their travels, was that the promise was to their people, not to a single generation, and when they reached their old lives, the promise still was in the future. Sarah was the first to die and when she did, the family had no land that they owned. Her burial plot was the first piece of real estate that they acquired. The location of that bit of land was determined by where they happened to be when that event occurred. So they negotiated a price and bought a bit of land and laid her to rest. The family continued to move for several generations before settling. And even then, they occupied the land for only a few

generations before time and circumstances forced their people to become nomads once again. We often speak of being a people of the story - a people of history - rather than a people of place.

As we continue to seek the place for the next part of our lives, we are sometimes a bit overwhelmed with the life of uncertainty. We have been enabled to live in some pretty wonderful places along our life's journey. We have met some really wonderful people and had some very great communities. We feel the urge both to move on and to stay. We experience the beauty and power of place, but we know that our ownership is always temporary. We live in this land for a little time. Time progresses. Things change. New generations are born and gather around the campfire. They keep singing and talking after the elders have gone to bed. It is the natural way of the world.

I still don't know where we will decide to live for the next phase of the adventure, but as we search for that place we are grateful for the conversations we are having along the way.

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July 16, 2019 – In the High Country



I genuinely love the Black Hills and the area we call home, but I have to admit that there are times when a bit of the biases from my growing up appear. When I was growing up, we were careful to refer to the Black Hills as “hills.” They aren’t mountains in our way of thinking because they do not reach up above the tree line. As wonderful as the Black Hills are, there is a big difference between our home and the place where we are this morning.

We are in Troy, Montana, after having driven around the southern end of Glacier National Park yesterday. Troy has the slogan, “Where Montana begins,” but for us it is where Montana ends. We entered Montana at Alzada, in the southeastern corner and are almost to the Idaho line and not far from the Canada line. We’ve driven diagonally across the fourth biggest state in the nation. So for this trip, Troy is where Montana ends for us. Today we’ll head across the top of Idaho panhandle and will be in Washington before long. We’re driving near the Canadian border this trip because we want to stay in the mountains as much as we are able.

We are camped in a cedar and Douglas fir forest. The trees are 100’ or more tall and a little rain shower has made the cedars smell so wonderful. We took a little walk down to the Kootenai River and watched the mighty stream on its journey through the mountains. We are surrounded by granite peaks that truly are the spine of the continent. One can feel small among all of the grandeur of our surroundings, but it is also a bit nostalgic for us as we journey.

Susan lived in Libby, about 15 miles from where we are camped for three years when she was a child. She can remember the forests and some of the streets and houses. And she can remember living in the mountains. I had an aunt, uncle and cousins in Libby and we visited them several times and there are many sights and sounds of the mountains that make me feel at home. It is one of the places that I would love to take our grandchildren one day.

As often as we remind ourselves that we are a people of the story and the keepers of history and not of place, we are reminded that place is important.

This trip is one of complex emotions for us. We are aware that we are coming to the end of an important phase of our lives. Our life in Rapid City has been rich and meaningful and filled with important relationships. There is a wonderful community of carling and loving people there and the thought of leaving gives us pause.

At the same time, we have been longing to be closer to our grandchildren for as long as we have had grandchildren. We look with envy at those who are able to attend their grandchildren’s school events and games. We long for more time with our children and the opportunity to witness the growth of our grandchildren. Family really is more important than geography to us. But even as we consider moving to another place, we are reminded of the role of geography in our lives. Even though we’ve lived in South

Dakota longer than either of us ever lived any other place, we have a sense that Montana is home. Whenever we visit, we feel like we are coming home. Yet there is not much for us in Montana. I have one sister and one brother who live in the state, but our folks are gone, our home places have been sold and many of our relatives have passed on as well. The places of our childhood and youth are now the places of other people and whenever we visit we are deeply aware of the gentrification of the rural places and the large number of new people who have moved to the state in the years that we have been living elsewhere. It is not the way it was when we were growing up. It is not the way it was when we left.

The high country has become a place for us to visit, not a place to call home. As we age, we will travel less and our opportunities to visit the high country will be limited. This makes each trip even more precious to us.

We don't have time on this trip to linger in the high country. We are passing through. We are lucky that this trip afforded us the opportunity to take the "long cut" and go to some of the places where we have experiences such great beauty and majesty. We need to keep moving on this trip. We are eager to get to the grandchildren who are at the end of the road.

For this morning, however, there are a few minutes to smell the fresh aroma of cedar, to walk among the giant trees and sense the darkness and intimacy of the forest floor, to sit by the river and watch its ceaseless motion and to remember. This is the land of those who went before us. The indigenous tribes of this area were here for generations before settlers arrived. Then there were generations of people, some of whom are our family members. In the course of time we appeared and were touched by the mountains and nourished by the rivers. We come back to the high country whenever we are able for the renewal and refreshment that they have to offer.

Yesterday the mountains didn't have the purple hue that is described in America the Beautiful. Instead they were nearly blue as we looked at them from the distance. We could see the line where the trees no longer grow and the patches of snow that have not yet melted. We could hear the river rushing by. Our spirits are being nourished and it is good to be in this place.

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July 17, 2019 – North Cascades National Park



I grew up with Yellowstone National Park in my back yard. Well, that is not literally true. If we were driving, it was 80 miles to the Northwest entrance to the park at Gardiner, Montana or 120 miles to the Northeast entrance at Cooke City. The nation's first National Park is mostly in Wyoming, but three of the park's five entrances are in Montana. What made us feel like the park was in our back yard, however, was that our family business provided aviation services to the park, including fire patrols, which meant that our father made regular flights over the park and I was fortunate to go with him on a lot of those flights. Our routine was to fly up the Boulder Valley over the Slough Creek Divide and over the center of the park's northern boundary. From there we would fly a loop, following the grand canyon of the Yellowstone to Yellowstone Lake, turning towards Old Faithful, flying over Norris and Mammoth, returning home up the Paradise Valley of the Yellowstone as we looked for any signs of smoke. I learned to tell the difference between smoke and steam from the airplane and I learned the locations and relationships between the park's iconic features.

One of the treats in our family was a winter visit to the park. We would make Chico Hot Springs in the Yellowstone Valley our base for the exploration and drive in through the northwest entrance. The steam from the Mammoth Terrace was always more intense in the winter and a walk around the area gave great views of the Elk who make that place

their home. We'd usually see bighorn sheep and sometimes got to witness the males crashing head long into each other with the resounding crack of impact. There were always deer and antelope to see. In the winter the bears were hibernating, but the buffalo were truly impressive as they showed their power plowing through the snow. We liked to drive across the north of the park, which was kept plowed, because the Cooke City highway from Red Lodge to Cooke City was not plowed, meaning that the only winter access to Cooke City was through the park. At tower junction, we could often make the hike to the falls, which was spectacular when covered in snow and ice. In those days there was a large rock that had not yet fallen right in the middle of the top of tower falls. We used to say, "Someday that rock is going to fall over the falls." It did.

Since Glacier National Park is also in my home state, I also had many opportunities to visit that park both by car and by air. The drive up the Going to the Sun Highway always afforded close views of mountain goats as well as lots of other critters. We visited Glacier in the summer, which like Yellowstone was a good place to spot bears.

With my Montana bias, I believed that the most beautiful national parks were Montana's two. They were, after all, where the concept of National Parks was first begun with Yellowstone being the first national park in the world.



Since then, we've had the blessing of visiting many other national parks and marveling at the beauty and grandeur of nature. I no longer think it is fair to compare the parks. There is no one that is the best. The most famous, like Yellowstone suffer a bit from so many people and there is great joy in visiting some of the less famous ones. You can really get away from people in all of the national parks by walking and that is the best way to really get to know the parks. We learned early on how to find places in Yellowstone that most tourists never see. A short walk or canoe trip will take you away from the crowds and into the wild country.

Living next to Badlands National Park these days is a real blessing. It is a place where it is very easy to get away from the crowds and see some incredible vistas.

This morning we are camped in North Cascades National Park, an incredible piece of alpine heights, waterfalls and temperate rainforest. It doesn't make the list of the most famous of our national parks, but, like the others, it is a real gem and well worth the visit. The main driving route through the park is Washington State Highway 20, and there is a lot that you can see by driving the switchbacks and steep road through the park. Like other parks, however, there are real treasures for those who take the time to park the car and get out to walk. Last night we took a short hike on a trail that led through a fire scar, down alongside the Skagit River, and through a forest of ancient old growth cedar, Douglas fir and hemlock. The forest floor was filled with ferns and lush vegetation and the huge trees were simply incredible to see. I've lived most of my life in relatively dry places, where a tall tree is perhaps 60 feet high with a trunk whose diameter may reach a couple of feet. These forest giants are so much bigger and more grand. When a giant tree falls, it become a nursery for new trees and the younger trees wrap their roots around the fallen giant as they grow. The forest dampens the sounds of the outside world and you hear mostly the wind and the drops of moisture falling from leaf to leaf.



North Cascades has towering snow covered granite peaks that rival those of Glacier, where we have also visited on this trip. Two national parks in as many days have inspired us and reminded us that the greatest cathedrals are not buildings crafted by human hands, but rather the works of the Creator.

It is a real gift to be in this place and to walk among the giants of the forest, who have been here for thousands of years. I am still learning lessons in humility and this place is an excellent teacher. How fortunate we are to be in this place.

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July 18, 2019 – So Lucky

Yesterday our daughter sent a text message with a picture of her son. The words she wrote were, “How did we get so lucky?” Her mother and her sister in law reminded her that there was more than luck involved in them becoming parents. They have worked hard for a long time towards this goal. It wasn't easy for them to become pregnant and she endured a lot to get to the point where she became a mother. My initial reaction was slightly different. I simply said that the feeling she was having is exactly the way I feel about her: “How did we get so lucky?”

Like all parents, we have experienced ups and downs along the way. Our son, who was born first, had to have surgery when he was just a baby. Our daughter had to have tubes placed in her ears after repeated ear infections as a tiny child. There were nights with little sleep and times when I didn't know if it would be possible to be more tired. There were a few boyfriends in whom I couldn't see the reason for any attraction and a few broken hearts when trust had been misplaced. There were times when we worried because of decisions that our children made. But all in all, being a parent is one of the greatest blessings of my life.

As a pastor, I have seen tragedies that have come into the lives of others. I have been with parents who have lost children through a number of different tragic events. I am aware of the dangers that are a part of this life. There are illnesses that rob families of their children. There are addictions that defy intervention and treatment. There are choices that have tragic consequences. Families experience trauma in many different ways. Our family has been very fortunate in avoiding these experiences.

These blessings in our life are not the product of our having earned them. Tragedies and traumas enter the lives of people without a sense of justice or fairness. They just happen.

I used to joke, when our son was a tiny baby, that the fact that he was so good at going to bed and sleeping through the night was a product of “superior parenting.” I knew, at least at some level, that this was not true. We were lucky to have a son who was so

content in his sleep. But at another level, I sort of believed myself. We had been careful about establishing bedtime routines. We were consistent in our expectations and our treatment of our son. Then his sister came into our family. She woke in the night every night. This went on for years. I became very, very tired. And, when I once complained to my mother about the interruptions of sleep, she had no sympathy at all. She said that perhaps I deserved to have such happen to me. I don't know about the "deserved" part, but I do know that the waking in the night and the fatigue in the daytime is just part of the process of being parents. And the time went by quickly and soon she was sleeping through the night. She continued to provide me with sleepless in the night well into her twenties. There were times when i worried about her and wondered where she was when she became old enough to have her driver's license and go out with her friends. My worst fears were never realized. And those times also passed quickly.

And now I am blessed with joys that multiply - literally. We have four grandchildren. Yesterday when we arrived at our son and daughter in law's home we were greeted by a grandson who ran out to the yard to meet us. Just inside the back door, we were hugged warmly by two granddaughters who had been scrambling to get on their shoes and coats so they could also run out. Throughout the day and into the evening there were hugs and kind words from young people. Our two year old kept saying, "It's perfect!" It is.

Part of the deep joy of being a grandparent is getting to witness the delight of our children in being parents. I watch our son playing with his children and it sparks memories of my own past. I can see that he really enjoys being a father. I can see that he loves his children and that he is delighted to have time to be with them. Knowing that our children have happy and meaningful lives is a blessing beyond words.

I know that there are challenges ahead. No life is without mistakes. No journey is without misdirection. I also have confidence that our family will be able to meet the challenges that will come our way.

I am envious of grandparents who are able to live so close to their grandchildren that they can attend every school program and recital and concert and game. I get deep pleasure and meaning from being with our grandchildren. That is one important factor in our decision to move from Rapid City next year when we complete our calls as pastors to the church we now serve. But I also know that it is unlikely that our two children will soon live near each other. For now they don't even live on the same continent. One of the priorities for our move is accessibility to public transportation so that we will be able to travel to visit our grandchildren wherever they are located.

Compared to families of previous centuries, we are blessed to have access to travel. That little grandson who is making our daughter feel so lucky was born in Japan. In a few days we'll be traveling to meet him face-to-face for the first time. We have already

seen videos and pictures of him. We have seen him over video chat on the phone and computer. These are luxuries unknown to the parents of previous generations.

How did we get so lucky?

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July 19, 2019 – In Over Our Heads

We have two children. It was a good number for our family. I sometimes say that we were in over our heads and outnumbered with one child, so two just intensified that sense of being a bit out of control. We used to call our style “tag team parenting.” One would be caring for the children while the other was working professionally. Then we’d switch roles. We both worked professionally during the time we had our children, but the distribution of work was different at different phases of our lives. From time to time I would wonder how my parents managed with seven children. We are speed out so there were never more than five at home at the same time, but still, five is a definite hand full and having them spread over the years makes the job of being a parent an endurance event. Even my wife’s parents, with three children, must have had their hands full.

Two was a good number for us. We had time to be attentive to the needs of each child, while at the same time maintaining our professional lives.

From time to time we would have activities or events that demanded that we both be working at the same time. We had a few babysitters that were trusted who helped us when we needed to be otherwise engaged. I can remember a few short trips or events we attended when we left the children in the care of church members or their grandparents. It always seemed to work out and our children seemed to enjoy the special attention of being with other adults.

My memories of going to such events is so positive that it is something that we have longed to be able to do for our children as they raise their families. Living far away from them, however, affords us few opportunities. But we have the chance yesterday and today.

Our son is attending a state librarian’s meeting and his wife is able to go with him because we are visiting and can take care of the children for a day and a half. So far, we’ve done well. They left in the morning yesterday. We got lunch and dinner into the children, went for walks, flew kites, played in the yard, had naps, read stories, sang songs and got the children into bed for the night. Today we will be the primary caregivers until after dinner when the parents will return in time for bedtime routines with the kids.

Here's where that number two comes into play. We are caring for three grandchildren. Three is definitely a step up in terms of workload from two. We're still using the tag team method, however. One of us will say to the other, "I'm going to go do this and that, you've got the kids." Then for a little while the other has to keep track of all three children. It works for us at the park or in their home for short periods of time. Yesterday, after having the two oldest grandchildren staying over night at our camper and feeding them breakfast, we managed to both get showered and dressed for the day without leaving the children unattended.

Adding the third kept us busy. Here is the deal. We aren't working professionally at the moment. We're on vacation, so we have full time to have both of us engaged in caring for our grandchildren. Our son and daughter-in-law are both professionals and they don't have that luxury. Their tag team means that when one of them is "it," that person has full responsibility for three kids. It is a handful. It is enough to give me a deep appreciation for their everyday lifestyle.

I fell asleep almost as soon as the oldest of the children was asleep. I was tired. We commented to each other that perhaps we would have the three sleep in their own home tonight after their parents return just so that we could have a little break after having responsibility for children two nights in a row. That's not very much compared with the everyday lives of our son and his wife.

For millennia human societies have raised children in communal settings. Multiple generations engage in the tasks of caring for children. Relatives help to provide care. People work together. Our society, with its increased levels of isolation, means that there are fewer additional adults to provide assistance with the tasks of caring for children. When we get a taste of it, however, we like the process of participating in family life.

There is really nothing like having a two-year-old cuddle up next to you and pat your back and tell you that you're a good grandpa. There is no joy greater than getting down on the floor and playing with one's grandchildren. Our eight year old grandson is a great one for silly jokes and puns. He keeps us laughing and thinking. Being with them is a delight that is good for us. And having meaningful work such as caring for children gives our lives a deep sense of purpose. It reminds us of the simple fact that we are not attracted by the possibilities of living in senior citizen housing - at least not unless they have plenty of children around. We've noticed that there are a few neighborhoods out here that advertise a community of people over 50. Those neighborhoods don't appeal to us. I'd much rather spend the day with my grandchildren than check out the activities at the senior citizens center. I've never picked up the games of golf, pool or pickle ball.

Even though I am a bit tired, it is a good feeling. I remember the long days and short nights when our children were tiny and we felt tired all of the time. There are many things in life worse than being tired.

All of this is simply to say that yes, we were in over our heads and outnumbered with a single child, and we were in over our heads and outnumbered with two children, and we're in over our heads and outnumbered with three grandchildren. Still, we have another grandchild. May be we could find an event for both sets of parents to go off on an adventure together so we could try our hands with four.

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July 20, 2019 – Hope Shared

Sometimes I complain about technology. I still think that I am perfectly capable of turning a crank to lower a car window and there is no reason to have a motor and actuator in every car door. I'm unconvinced of the need for huge video displays in car dashboards and I still enjoy looking at an actual paper map to orient myself when navigating. I've never been a fan of television and watch very little of that media.

On the other hand I am a kind of gadget guy. I travel with a laptop computer nearly everywhere that I go. I have a smart phone and I'm not afraid to use it. I didn't think I wanted a tablet computer but as soon as I got one I started using it every Sunday as I lead worship.

When our daughter was living in England I began using Skype for video conversations every week. Now with a new grandson in Japan I FaceTime a lot, sometimes multiple times in the same day. I love having instant photographs of my daughter and her husband and son. I love showing those photographs to friends and family.

It has been interesting to share the photos of our new grandson with our youngest granddaughter. She is just two years old, but she feels a deep connection with the baby who lives half a world away. Whenever I show her a picture, she tries to grab the phone out of my hand and pull it close to her face. She talks to the screen of the phone as if he were right in the room. Of course she has grown up with technology. She doesn't find anything new or strange about pictures on a phone and she has been encouraged to talk to the faces on the devices for all of her life. The device is, however, enabling a genuine relationship and a connection that otherwise would be impossible.

We live in a rapidly changing world and each of us make choices about which changes to embrace and which to resist. Even when we don't actively resist changes, there are things that change with which we are challenged to keep up the pace. I no longer have much of a need to be completely up to date with computer equipment. I use computers every day, but it doesn't bother me that I don't have the latest and most powerful machines. As long as I can write and publish my journal, I'm happy with the equipment that I have. I don't feel the need to keep up with the latest in gaming or graphic design or a host of other uses for technological devices. I use apps on my phone, but there are

a lot that I don't bother to learn. I have a twitter account and occasionally post news about the church, but most of the time I ignore the medium. I don't follow any twitter users and I don't use the app to read about anyone. I've never gotten into snapchat. I have a facebook account, but can go for days without checking my feed. I am friends only with those who I know from face to face relationships and I rarely post anything on Facebook. You won't find pictures of my grandchildren on my Facebook page, though I have tens of thousands of digital photos of them.

All the same, the world will be very different for our grandchildren. They assume that various technologies have always been around and they use them with ease and often without being aware that the technologies they use weren't available to their parents when they were children. Our eight year old grandson knows how to use all of the remotes for the television and he knows which Netflix programs he is allowed to watch. Our five year old granddaughter knows which buttons to push on the remote fob to open the doors on their car.

Our grandchildren are not growing up in a home that allows much time in front of screens, however. They play outdoors every day. They entertain themselves with games and toys. They spend part of each day in the garden with their parents. They have a strawberry patch and plenty of tomato plants and know how to choose ripe fruit to eat fresh from the garden. Their games often involve the world they know. Yesterday an elaborate garden was drawn with sidewalk chalk, including berry plants and apple and cherry trees and corn and other garden plants. They can walk to a nearby park and enjoy playing on the slides and swings. They live near a lake that is just right for wading and swimming and water play. They are entertained by mud pies and running through the sprinkler and making their own toys out of items they can readily find around their home.

Most importantly, from my point of view, our grandchildren are learning to play with each other. The eight year old helps the two year old and the five year old pitches right in. I am in settings where people are so divided by into groups by age that I meet children who don't know how to play with others of different ages. I know quite a few adults who don't spend much time at all playing with children. Life is so much richer when we spend time and get to know those who are different than ourselves. I am delighted by every opportunity to spend time with children.

Of course I'm delighted with and amazed by and proud of my grandchildren. But I know others who are equally amazing. Not every child in our country is being raised in front of television screens. There are lots of kids who run and play and enjoy the outdoors. There are lots of kids who have chores and who learn to pitch in when help is needed. There are lots of kids who are creative and learning. And those kids give me great delight in the present and hope for the future.

One of the responsibilities of elders in every society is to instill hope in young people. We get our inspiration and our hope from those young people themselves. It is a great system.

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July 21, 2019 – Pancakes

“Grandpa, I think we’d better have pancakes for breakfast.” We were having a conversation about what to have for breakfast in our camper with a couple of grandchildren sleeping over in the camper. When we travel we have a range of meal options as the camper has a small pantry area and a refrigerator which give us ample space for food storage. We have a nice stove and oven, so can cook the same foods we have at home. When there are just the two of us, we might have eggs and toast or oatmeal or granola and yogurt for breakfast. However, when our grandchildren are with us they seem to always want pancakes.

I understand. Pancakes are a special treat. They get them at their home, but it is not the everyday fare. They are much more likely to have eggs and bacon for breakfast. The tradition of pancakes at the camper started when our grandson was only two years old and had his first sleep over at the camper. We had pancakes for breakfast because I like to make pancakes and because I thought it would be a special treat for the adventurous young camper. Somehow that became a tradition. He taught his sister that pancakes would be offered, so we had to have them when she started sleeping in the camper. Now there are two sisters and pancakes have become the standard fare for the camper.

I don’t mind. I like pancakes. I like to make them. And there are lots of fresh berries available around here, so we often have blueberry pancakes. Despite the fact that it is the 21st of July and the weather is warm, they are still harvesting plenty of strawberries from their garden, so strawberry pancakes are definitely an option as well.

As various waves of migration took people across the North American continent, they traveled with a few staple foods. Flour was fairly easy to transport in wagons, and was considered an essential traveling food. Fresh meats were nearly impossible to transport without refrigeration, so they were limited to game harvested along the way. Pancakes were easy to make with available ingredients. Many of the settlers carried sourdough starter with them as they traveled and used it for leavening for bread and pancakes. A sturdy cast iron skillet was considered to be essential kit for traveling, so they had all of the ingredients.

We used to have pancakes for breakfast when we were ten campers when our children were young. I’ve made pancakes when backpacking in the high country. I have an association between pancakes and camp cooking deep in my memories and traditions.

It is, however, interesting to listen to an eight-year-old instruct his two-year-old sister in the traditions of camping. He first stayed in our camper when he was a bit older than she is now, so it seems to him like something he's been doing for a very long time. It doesn't seem like such long time to me. I think of this particular camper as being new and though we've used it a lot, there is a lot more life in it. And this camper affords a high degree of luxury for us. We have a complete kit of kitchen dishes and pots and pans along with a comfortable bed and even a full bathroom with a shower. We aren't exactly "roughing it" when we use this camper.

It is, however, mobile and we can take it with us to interesting places. This summer's trip, however, is mostly a matter of being parked in our son's yard. The grandchildren can walk to the camper and back home if they have forgotten a favorite toy or some article of clothing. Last night they all had their baths in their own home before coming to the camper to sleep. Some days they run back home to get dressed in the morning.

All the same it is an adventure for grandchildren and it has its own traditions. And the tradition of pancakes was reinforced earlier this summer when we took our two oldest grandchildren to grand camp at our church camp where they served pancakes for breakfast. From the perspective of our grandchildren, we always have pancakes when camping, whether sleeping in a cabin or in the camper.

So it's pancakes for breakfast this morning. The youngest of the grandchildren decided to sleep in her own bed last night, so we invited her and her parents to the camper for breakfast.

There was a trip last summer, however, when we had a much fancier breakfast. I asked the two oldest children, who were seven and four at the time what we should have for breakfast and the seven year old chose pancakes, but the four year old thought macaroni and cheese would be the perfect breakfast. They both got their wish. I'm not what you'd call a gourmet chef, but I can make macaroni and cheese out of a box. Happy campers is one of grandpa's specialties. But we haven't gotten any requests for mac and cheese for breakfast this summer. It's pancakes all the way.

For me, what we eat isn't important. What is important is creating memories and enjoying one another. We have the relaxed pace of vacation while our son and daughter in law have to maintain a more robust pace with jobs to do, a home to keep up, a garden to tend and a lot of other chores. They have to have efficiencies about their daily lives that enable them to do a lot of different tasks. We have the luxury of having just a little bit more time for fun and for keeping up the traditions of camping with grandma and grandpa. We have lived long enough to know how quickly the years go by. Our grandchildren won't be children for long. These are years to enjoy and savor because we know how precious they are.

So welcome to the camper. We'll be having pancakes for breakfast.

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July 22, 2019 – Disconnecting

I have not really unplugged from the world. I have checked news sites every day of our vacation. I have kept up with most of my email. I have remained connected to what is going on in the world. But I have done a few things that I have not done in a long while. I have left my phone sitting while I worked in the garden. I have played with my grandchildren while ignoring my email. I have gone for walks without taking along any devices. I think that I am beginning to model and learn a bit of what my life might be like in a few years.

Still, there are interesting connections. Text messaging allows me to remain connected with our daughter in Japan and we've been using FaceTime to stay up with our new grandson. I consulted with a colleague about music for a funeral via text. Yesterday, Susan was engaged in a flurry of texts just after 8 am local time. The person who was staffing the church nursery at home was running a few minutes late and texted Susan to inform her, even though he knew that she was out of state. Rather than get him to contact the church administrative colleague, she acted as the middle person and made sure that the communication was completed. Fortunately we were only one time zone away and it didn't interfere with our Sunday morning activities here, but we travel to Japan next week and things will be much different when we are in the part of the world.

Instant communication and 24/7 connectivity mean that we are able to do part of our work when on vacation and, for the most part, we don't mind doing what we are able to keep the church running efficiently. We are aware, however, that over the years we have developed a style of leadership that involves a certain amount of doing things behind the scenes. When we complete our ministry in our current call next year, we will be ending some of those things that we do for the church and it will be necessary for the church to learn to trust new leaders who will do things differently. A year from now we won't be on call all the time to make sure that the various systems of the church are all functioning. Over the next year we need to teach others about all of the things that are required to keep the church running smoothly.

I was paging through Mother Earth magazine last evening as I was winding down from a lovely day. I like to read the ads. It is a bit of a surprise to me how a magazine devoted to simple living and getting back to the land is sponsored by ads for diesel tractors, expensive mills and machines. One would infer from the magazine that getting back to the land involves a lot of power tools. I was marveling last night at how many companies make electric egg incubators. Apparently some in the back to the earth movement have decided that electric devices are more reliable than chickens. There was an ad for an

incinerating toilet that requires no septic system. It does, however, require 240 volts of electricity, which doesn't put it in the category of off-grid devices.

The ad that caught my eye, however, was one for an online training program to become a "Life Event Celebrant." The ad promised an exciting new career in a rapidly growing field. Once completing the program, the individual is prepared to conduct weddings, funerals and other significant ceremonies in people's lives. The ad caught my attention because, as readers of my journal know, that I what I've been doing for over four decades. I officiate at funerals, weddings, baptisms, confirmations, and a host of other ceremonies. And, from my point of view, it isn't exactly a "rapidly growing field." There are plenty of couples who live together without having a ceremony and it seems that the number is increasing. I haven't noticed a decrease in the demand for funerals and end of life celebrations, but I have noticed that there are more and more of those events that are divorced from the traditions and ceremonies of the church.

It would appear, from the ad, that when people separate themselves from the church, they develop a need for ritual and ceremony. And there are people who step up to perform those ceremonies for profit. I've attended a few "secular" weddings and funerals over the years, and they are filled with elements drawn directly from religious ceremonies. In many cases the officiant is completely unaware of the history and tradition that surrounds the things they are doing. They think they have discovered something new when they are using words and ceremonies that have developed over a long history.

I won't be signing up for life event celebrant classes. I intend to stick with the church. And, when our family needs others for the events of our lives, we'll turn to the church for community and ceremony.

And that is the reason that I won't be coming back to the church we now serve to perform weddings and funerals and other events once I have moved on from this particular call. I believe that the new pastors will need to develop bonds and connections with the congregation and without interference from the previous pastor. Weddings and funerals are ways to develop and strengthen relationships with new leaders.

I suppose that it is possible that I will miss being the one who is called to solve the various problems of the church. I might get to the point where an empty email inbox causes me to feel like I am out of the loop. Right now I am looking forward to the change. I think I will like being a bit less in the center of every conversation. I might even enjoy reading the ads in the back of the magazine more often. I doubt, however, that I'll find a new career among those ads.

July 23, 2019 – Long Sleeves in the Summer

I was stacking firewood yesterday. It is an activity in which I have engaged in many different settings at many different stages of my life. My son and daughter-in-law burn wood as a supplemental fuel. They can heat their house with a propane furnace, but they like to burn wood to keep the fuel costs down. Last year they burned about four cords of wood and expect to burn a similar amount this year. Our son has put considerable effort into improving his wood shed to protect the wood from the rains which are common in this part of the country. At any rate a neighbor delivered a cord of wood to the driveway yesterday and it needed to be stacked in order to return the driveway to its typical use.

The neighbor who delivered the wood stopped by later in the afternoon and while we were having a conversation about the firewood and other topics, he commented on my long sleeved shirt. "I don't know how you can stand to work in that shirt," he said. I didn't say much in response, but noted that he was wearing a sleeveless t-shirt that presumably he had been wearing earlier when splitting, loading and delivering firewood. I've done a lot of outdoors work over the years wearing t shirts, but these days I prefer long-sleeved shirts for most of my outdoor activities. I wear long sleeved shirts when paddling, walking and working.

The change for me came about in part because of the need to have some squamous cell skin cancer treated. After having an area on my arm excised, I decided to be more careful about sun exposure. While I realize that the presence of skin cancer is the result of years of exposure and I can't erase prior years activities, I can be more careful about my choice of shirts and hats in the presence.

Actually, the shirts I wear are very comfortable and adjusting to them was not a problem for me. Sure I get hot working outdoors in the summer sun, but I was likely to get hot anyway. I keep up my fluid intake and don't experience any undue discomfort from my activities or my choice of clothing.

Pale skin is not much of a burden from my point of view. I have had trouble with sunburn and the effects of the sun all of my life, but it is fairly easy to deal with the problem. I can feel sunburn setting in and I know how to step into the shade and avoid sunburn. There are a lot of different sunscreen products available that can help protect my skin as well, and I use sunscreen when I'm going to be out in the sun. That's about it. In a country and a culture that gives so many advantages to those of us with light colored skin, I certainly have nothing of which to complain.

There have been a few articles that I have read about some potential risks associated with the over use of sunscreen, but there is nothing of which I am aware that makes me worry about using the products. I don't use any where near as much as was used in the experiments, which so far have involved a very small number of people. And I am not at

risk for not getting enough vitamin D. I go outside every day and even when the weather is bad I get plenty of sunshine. And the risks associated with absorption of the chemicals in sunscreen into the bloodstream are very low and not well documented.

Being careful about sun exposure seems like an easy task. It took a bit of practice to teach myself to wear a hat every day. Having a job that is often done indoors, I hadn't put much attention into hats. However, when I got serious about protecting myself from the sun, I discovered that I own a lot of hats. I have always enjoyed wearing hats and a hat figures into the story of how I met my wife, so I'm well situated for that particular piece of clothing.

The risks associated with the type of skin cancer that I have experienced are low, though having experienced it does mean that I am more likely to develop additional areas and I get to visit the dermatologist more often than was the case before it was diagnosed. The diagnosis means that my insurance company has to pay out a bit of the premiums that it has collected over decades of excellent health.

I try to do my part and make clothing choices and use sunscreen and try to limit my overall exposure to ultraviolet radiation from the sun. On the other hand, there is no chance that I will turn into a person who stays indoors all the time. I like being outdoors and the joys of the things I do outdoors outweigh the risks involved.

On the other hand, I didn't bore the firewood guy with a long lecture on skin cancer and the reasons why I choose long sleeved shirts. I've never been very big on converting other people. I am content with my ideas and my way of life and don't feel a need to change others. That applies to my religious convictions as well. I don't mind sharing my religious beliefs. I am, after all, a minister who preaches every week. I prefer, however, to have my ideas take their place in a wide marketplace of ideas and I trust others to make their own decisions. I don't feel a need to convert those who disagree or to change those who choose not to live by religious principles. In fact there are more than a few people who consider themselves to be Evangelical Christians whose behavior has been far less than Christian and who give religion a bad name. Rather than loudly declare my faith and seek to change others, I prefer to live my life in such a way that others lives are positively affected. It is a bit like long sleeves. I prefer to wear them. You're free to make your own clothing choices.

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July 24, 2019 – Rare Treats

Having grandchildren in northwest Washington and living in Rapid City, South Dakota, one of the luxuries of our lives has been relatively regular travel between the two places. Being native Montanans, we enjoy the drive across our home state and know several routes that we can take. On this particular journey, we drove diagonally across

the state, entering Montana at Alzada in the southeastern corner and exiting at Troy in the northwest corner. Montana is the fourth largest state in the United States and driving the route we took, stopping at the family ranch in Floweree, is nearly an 800-mile trek. Most of the time, we drive a bit more directly across the state, but even so, it is a trip of more than 550 miles. We have developed certain stopping places where we regularly top for food or fuel or just to take a walk and stretch our legs. One of our traditions, when crossing Montana, is a stop at St. Regis Travel Center for huckleberry shakes. We've been known to make the stop in the morning as well as the afternoon, depending on what time we happen to arrive. Once in St. Regis, a huckleberry shake is in order regardless of the time of day. The trick to a St. Regis huckleberry shake is that they use huckleberry ice cream. Lots of places make shakes with vanilla ice cream and syrup, but huckleberry ice cream is not commonly available outside of Montana, where Wilcoxson's Ice Cream makes the flavor. And yes, Vermonters, there is a BIG difference between Wilcoxson's Ice Cream and Wilcox Ice Cream. I have my biases. Besides Wilcox doesn't make huckleberry.

When we take the most northern route through Montana, driving around Glacier National Park on US highway 2, the stopping point is the Huckleberry Patch in Hungry Horse, just nine miles from West Glacier. Their shakes contain the most real huckleberries per shake of any place that I know. Huckleberries aren't like blueberries. Huckleberries are small enough to go through a straw.

Of course there are other stops. We rarely drive by Wheat Montana, near Three Forks, where the Gallatin, Madison and Jefferson form the Missouri River. Wheat Montana has a great deli with all kinds of sandwiches and, of course their signature Montana wheat products, which include cinnamon rolls, breads and all kinds of bakery products. The one purchase I nearly always make at Wheat Montana is their coconut macaroons. They know how to get them just right. I always buy a couple of them.

It is a good thing that we live so far away from these wonderful foods. Otherwise I might be tempted to indulge way too often.

A big difference between where we are in Washington and our home is that there are a lot of berry farms around here. We've been out picking blueberries and raspberries and there are places where you can pick strawberries. There are also blackberry picking farms, but those are hardly necessary as wild blackberries are very common all around and all you have to do during blackberry season is take a walk with a basket.

This week I discovered that one of the local berry picking farms has, in their value added store, in addition to berry pies, coconut macaroons. Schuh farms is known locally for their pumpkins and their corn maze in the fall, but in the middle of the summer, it is the place to pick berries. The raspberries are really coming on right now and we picked enough to fill the freezer for the year. When we went to the farm store to pay for the berries, a couple of macaroons managed to find their way into the package.

I was enjoying half of a macaroon last night and thinking about some of the special treats that add so much pleasure to life. My life is filled with copious luxuries. I have not only special food treats, but I get special pleasures like visits from grandchildren and sleepovers in the camper and reading stories and singing silly songs. There are so many things I look forward to when we are traveling to our grandchildren's home.

One of the dynamics of these treats is that they are not our everyday experiences. We have a rich and meaningful life with purposeful work, a lovely home, wonderful neighbors, and so much more. But our children live many miles away from us. We joke that we envy people whose children live close by. We'd settle for having them live close to each other. Actually, it would be a treat for us if they lived on the same continent. Our daughter and son in law have had some great experiences living overseas and we have gotten some wonderful trips out of their adventures, but we certainly would like to be able to visit more often. As it is every visit is a special treat because it is out of the ordinary. Some things in life seem special because they are rare. One or perhaps two huckleberry shakes per year, three or four coconut macaroons, and I am able to look forward to the next one with anticipation for a long time. And the anticipation is part of the joy. Just like Christmas for a child, the build-up and the waiting are all part of the experience.

I was watching our granddaughter last night, picking strawberries. Despite the warm weather, their garden is still yielding quite a few strawberries every day. Our Washington grandchildren all know the joy of picking produce and eating it straight out of the garden. Cherry tomatoes, berries, peas and other produce is available to them in season. They have even been known to pull a carrot, brush off most of the dirt and plop it into their mouths. I'm pretty sure that they don't know what a luxury they have in their everyday lives. They think of such bounty as normal and usual. I'm glad they have such healthy lives, and I'm sure that there are other treats that are rare for them.

For now, a visit from grandma and grandpa is a rare treat - one they look forward almost as much as we do.

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July 25, 2019 – Building Community

Last evening my son and I installed a metal roof on a small woodshed in his yard. The shed started life as a roof constructed to protect a woodpile. It was poorly constructed and he decided to rebuilt it. He added framing to reinforce and strengthen the structure, put siding on the exterior walls and now a new roof on the structure. He already has plans in mind for an additional woodshed in his yard and probably will start construction within a few days. Our visit means that he has access to a pickup truck which enables him to tackle some jobs that are challenging without the truck. He did, however, learn a

lot about hauling things in other vehicles from his father. When we didn't have a pickup I hauled all of the lumber for an extension of our deck on the roof rack of our car. It can be done. It takes more trips and some ingenuity, but it can be done. At any rate, I'm pleased to have him use our pickup and enjoy being invited to participate in some of his projects.

There are conversations that one can have in a one-on-one situation that don't seem to occur in larger group settings. Yesterday was filled with such opportunities for me. I gave our grandson a ride to his day camp in the morning. It was just the two of us for a 20-minute ride. We talked about everyday things, including the things he likes best about the day camp and a new friend he has made. Then, in the afternoon one of our granddaughters came with me as I set up the grill and cooked part of the dinner. She picked flowers for our camper, showed me some special smooth rocks that she had found, and told me how much she likes to play outside. Then, after we had read stories to the children, my son and I had a little while to work on the woodshed project. We talked a little about the woodshed plans and how they are learning to manage firewood. We talked a little about his work.

The conversations we had yesterday were normal, everyday conversations. In a way they weren't all that different from the conversations I have with a lot of different people in the course of my work in the church. Community is built out of normal everyday people sharing their normal everyday lives with one another. Their hopes and concerns are voiced and met with a caring response. Tasks are shared. I have long been impressed with how much of the work of the church is done through simple sharing of tasks. We might be working together on a church repair or doing dishes in the kitchen or cleaning up and rearranging furniture after a program. The conversations we have build bonds between people and make connections that make the next shared job just a little bit easier and the sense of belonging just a little bit deeper.

As a pastor, I am aware that just like any family, our church family has a few personality quirks. We are not all the same. There are a few things that some folks do or say that drive other folks up the wall. Life in community always requires work and the work is not always evenly distributed. Some folks pitch in and do work for others. Our need for community doesn't require perfection. What we need is tolerance for one another's mistakes, the ability to confess our mistakes and the power of forgiveness. Every family learns those lessons in the course of everyday life. We watch our grandchildren learning about saying, "I'm sorry and really meaning it." Sometimes it is a hard lesson, but it is an important lesson in communal living.

Our society isn't very good at providing community for some of its members. Social media can provide some types of relationships, but it is not good at the one-on-one, shoulder-to-shoulder working relationships that build community. Virtual community falls short of real community when life presents us with crises, losses and the difficult decisions that come to each person.

Being on vacation and having traveled far from the community where we live and work has been good for me. I have been aware of the relationships that I miss and the connections that I want to strengthen and build when I return. I am aware of how much work remains in the time that we have as pastors of this particular congregation. Knowing that a year from now we will be making a major change in community in our own lives makes the process of building a resilient community for others all the more urgent. The church that has nurtured our family for a quarter of a century will continue to be a loving and caring congregation. It will continue to be a good place for a pastor and the pastor's family. It will continue to share community and reach out to others with genuine hospitality, care and concern. It is not a perfect community. There are things in need of repair, relationships in need of healing and new ways in need of learning. But it is a strong community and will continue to be meaningful in the lives of those who belong. Part of the role of every member of a community is to understand how the community continues beyond our brief time of connection. We make investments in the future that reaches beyond the span of our time. Learning to say good bye is an essential part of the process.

It is not, however, easy. A vacation is giving me some perspective that will help when I return and lead the next few months of the life of the congregation. Clearly the life of the congregation is not about me. It is about reaching beyond who we currently are and discovering what we are in the process of becoming. New leaders will emerge. New members will shape the future of the community. We have an opportunity to leave a legacy, but we do not control the future.

This particular congregation will have a special place in my heart for all of my life. Still, I am but a small part of a much bigger story - one that will unfold beyond my wildest imagination.

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July 26, 2019 – Choosing Gifts

In two days we leave for Japan. Of course our minds have really been focused on Japan for two weeks, now as the news of our newest grandson's birth and the joys of following his first few days have meant daily contact with our daughter. Our relationship with Japan, however, is more complex and wonderful than just the story of one daughter and her husband and son. There is another daughter and a whole family with whom we feel deeply connected. In 1998, we hosted an exchange daughter from Japan for an entire year. Masami lived in our home and shared our family life, including a family vacation to the West Coast that included visits to Seattle and Whidby Island, very close to where we currently are visiting. Last year, twenty years after that year, we were able to reconnect with her and visit her family home, meet her parents and sister and her sister's family and renew our relationship. Because of the travel time and the time

zones involved, the days get slightly confused, but when we arrive on Monday afternoon, we will get to our hotel and then meet Masami and her mother. Our connection with her parents is deep even though we have only met face to face once. After all, we have shared the same daughter for two decades.

With our hearts and minds set on Japan and in eager anticipation of our reunion with Masami and her mother, we've been trying to select a few gifts to mark the occasion. Gifts are an important part of Japanese culture and they function slightly differently in Japan than they do in our traditions and place. To understand, one needs to know a bit about the story of Japan and how that story has shaped its people.

There are certain periods of time that exert heavy influence on who we are in the present. For those of us who speak the English language, the mid-sixteenth century is one of those times. Shakespeare was penning plays that would be used in the education of our language for centuries, including the present time. The King James Version of the Bible began to take shape and exert more influence on the shape of the Christian Church than any other version of that book. da Vinci's Mona Lisa was a new painting. Michelangelo's David was a new sculpture, just a few decades since its creation.

Over in China, the Ming dynasty was leading the technological advancements of the age. Chinese officials penned poetry and practiced calligraphy between official meetings.

In Japan, however, at that same time, a century of warfare and destruction was upon the people. Famines, fires and natural disasters marked the century. Taxation was high. Poverty was rampant. Society was torn apart. Ordinary people sought solace in Buddhism while the emperor and court were merely puppets of the shogun military possessed all the real power. Feudal lords, called the daimyo, ruled over local areas, lived in lavish castles and installed samurai warriors in the towns. The samurai were educated and powerful and were extremely loyal to the daimyo. The great temple, one of many in the capital, Kyoto, had lavish gardens perfectly established and adorned with expensive ornaments. The cities were growing, and a merchant class was beginning to develop because the samurai needed the services of money lenders to support their lavish lifestyles. Moneylending, however, was on the edge of the law, so merchants were always at risk of having their wealth taken away while most of the people hovered on the edge of poverty. There was little certainty and much anxiety.

In the midsts of all of these contrasts, Zen Buddhism was on the rise among all classes. The rich could afford lavish tea rooms and ceremonies with expensive Chinese tea bowls and utensils. The poor could still enjoy the ceremony and aroma of tea with simple utensils such as a plain bamboo tea scoop. It became popular among the wealthy to practice a form of asceticism. Smaller and less lavish tea rooms were built and a focus on the sensual nature of simple tea, especially green Matcha tea, originally

from China, but now thriving in several locations in Japan. This new approach was known as Wabi. Wabi tea ceremonies became popular among all classes of people. Great tea masters began to shape the focus of Japanese culture from the worship of wealth to the worship of simplicity. Poets crafted new word combinations to express this new way of stillness and appreciation of the simple things of life. A new appreciation of humility along with an acceptance of the fact that the true needs of humans are very simple became the focus of an emerging unity among Japanese people and the reversal of the dominance of the wealth of a very few at the expense of the masses. If everyone aspires to live simply - to live wabi - then all are equal. Peace begins to descend upon the people. This peace, along with the knowledge that we all share a common history and a past and the awareness of the natural cycle of life and death is sabi. Thus wabi sabi became an important principle in Japanese life.

A simple gift, given with out lavish expense or as a show of wealth, became a gesture of equality and appreciation of the joys of friendship. An item of everyday use such as a handkerchief or a pen or a teacup can convey great beauty. Appreciation of that beauty and of the joy of giving something unadorned and austere is an expression of the connectedness between people. Choosing a gift for a Japanese friend requires an investment of time over an investment of money. Thoughtfulness for simplicity and beauty are treasures that have shaped Japanese culture for centuries. A moment of appreciation in the midst of a busy live is a lesson in what is most important.

So we are searching for a few simple, inexpensive gifts that convey beauty and appreciation. A book, a cap, a scarf, or even a simple photograph might be selected. It needs to be right and that requires thoughtfulness.

The process is very good for us. It incorporates the wisdom of the centuries. It is a gift for all of us.

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July 27, 2019 – Baby Shark!

Baby shark, do do do do do
Baby shark, do do do do do
Baby shark, do do do do do
Baby shark!

Momma shark, do do do do do
Momma shark, do do do do do
Momma shark, do do do do do
Momma shark!

The viral children's song goes through the entire shark family and ends with:

Grandpa shark, do do do do do
Grandpa shark, do do do do do
Grandpa shark, do do do do do
Grandpa shark!

The tune is catchy and easily becomes an ear worm: one of those songs you just can't get out of your head. It is showing up everywhere. Yesterday it was played over the PA system at the baseball game between the Washington Nationals and the Los Angeles Dodgers as Gerardo Parra was brought in as a pinch hitter. The crowd of nearly 40,000 people roared a few minutes later when he hit a bunt and fielding error ended up with the Nationals loading the bases. But baseball is a game of quick reversals and minutes later Parra was cut down at the plate and the inning ended with the score tied. Parra froze instead of sliding and he turned from hero to goat in a matter of just a few minutes. The Nationals ended up losing 4-2. The shark failed to bite the Dodgers. Had Parra slid, he might have scored and the game might have gone the other way. Baseball is full of speculations about what might have happened.

I'm not a big fan of the Washington Nationals, but I know a guy who is. In fact he and his brother were in the stands during yesterday's game. I have a picture that he sent by text during the game. The picture was enough to get me to read the account of the game this morning in the online version of the Washington Post. That guy who was at the game and I share a grandson. His son his married to my daughter. We stay in touch. After all, we share the role in the final verse of the baby shark song:

Grandpa shark, do do do do do
Grandpa shark, do do do do do
Grandpa shark, do do do do do
Grandpa shark!

Our grandson is too young for the song. He was just two weeks old yesterday. The other grandpa wasn't thinking of our shared grandson when the son was played at the ball game yesterday. And he probably doesn't know how many times I sang the baby shark song yesterday. I did sing it a lot.

While it may not yet be the song for that grandson, it seems to be a big hit with our two-year-old granddaughter. She started the day yesterday wearing an outfit that had a cartoon character shark on it and we could hear "do do do do do" from her as she finished up getting dressed with socks and shoes and as she rode in her car seat to the farm where we picked blueberries. She and her sister and brother picked quite a few berries with their little buckets. The adults added to the efforts, harvesting a real haul of berries to be frozen and eaten during the course of the year to come.

The outfit the two year old was wearing didn't make it through the day. The place where we picked blueberries sold ice cream. All the the other members of our party had blueberry ice cream, but the two year old insisted on chocolate. And two year olds have a way of insisting on things that is impossible to ignore. By the time she had consumed a half pint of ice cream, a good portion of that ice cream was spread across her face from her forehead to her chin, covering both of her hands and, of course, running down her outfit. She is, after all, a two-year old. By supper time she was on her third outfit of the day. The baby shark outfit was in the laundry basket, but the song was still running through our minds.

Grandpa likes to sing the song with his granddaughter. The way she sings "Do do do do do" is very precious. Grandpa knows a lot of kids songs.

When our son was not much more than two he noted the difference between his two grandmothers by declaring that one of his grandmas was a cookie grandma and the other was a sweater grandma. My mom was the knitter and Susan's mom was the baker. Our brand new grandson will, at some point, notice that his grandpas are a bit different from each other. On will be able to tell him all of the details of baseball games. He'll share lots of fan items from Washington Nationals and New York Giants games. He'll try to instill fan loyalty in his grandson the sam way he did in his sons. I'm not that grandpa. I don't follow the games more than is required to have a somewhat intelligent conversation with the baseball grandpa.

I'm going to be the song and story grandpa for that little guy the same way I am for his cousins. After all, I read the account of the game and I can't tell you how many pitchers the Nationals went through or what the names of the other players are. What struck my eye from the write-up of the game was the baby shark song. Do do do do do!

I know the words to dozens of Sesame Street songs and I tear up when reading the lyrics of Mr. Rogers songs to my grandchildren as poetry - something that I recommend to all grandparents of our generation. The YouTube app on my phone brings up all kinds of children's songs, including baby shark for play at a moment's notice. It's no contest, I'm definitely not the baseball grandpa.

I do, however, know that grandpa and he's a great guy. Our grandson is lucky to have him for one of his grandpas. He will be a great support to our daughter and son-in-law as they journey through the ups and downs of parenthood.

Meanwhile, I'm pretty good at entertaining the little ones during car rides. I've got a lot of songs, do do do do do, lot of songs!

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July 28, 2019 – Messing About

Please note: Today we fly to Japan. Since we will cross the International Date Line, our days and times will seem strange from the perspective of readers who are not traveling. We get on the airplane this afternoon and land tomorrow afternoon in Japan, except it will still be today here. I will continue to post in my journal daily, but will do so by local time wherever I am. So there will be a skipped day as we travel this direction and a doubled day when we return. Sorry for any confusion this causes. Check the journal for regular updates and although there may be a skipped day, things will continue as usual. Also, I will post in *The Adventures of Edward Bear* each time we change location, so you can check to see where we are.

I've posted this quote in my journal several times before. It seems to be one of the themes of my life: "Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing - absolutely nothing - half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats." (Kenneth Grahame, [The Wind in the Willows](#))



That is exactly what we did yesterday morning. We simply messed about in boats. I so enjoy canoeing and kayaking that one of the deep pleasures of my life is sharing that passion with others. A dozen years ago, when visiting Maine, we stopped by the outlet store of the Old Town Canoe Company. I don't know what I expected to purchase, but

we just wanted to look around. I ended up buying a very small kayak. The boat is one that was never put into production. It is the same shape as the Otter, which was produced, but it has a couple of watertight bulkheads and a small hatch for stowing cargo. The boat has a “model name” on it: Dimension. If you check it out, this is the only “Dimension” Old Town ever built. It is a very basic boat, quite wide and stable and made of rotomolded plastic. It is nearly indestructible and easy for a beginner to paddle. I’ve used it myself as a play boat and sometimes paddle it at the very edges of the season when there is ice on the lake. I also use it for basic instruction with those who have never before paddled.

My philosophy of teaching paddling is that you allow the boat and the paddle to do the teaching. Very little actual instruction is required. I know a bit of the techniques employed by the American Canoe Association in teaching basic skills and paddle techniques and strokes, but I like to allow new paddlers to get the feel of the boat by themselves. I make sure they have a good life vest and that they have been out in water deep enough to be able to trust that vest. Then I teach a basic draw stroke and a back stroke and then allow them to play with the boat. They will soon learn to make the boat go where they want most of the time. After they are comfortable in the boat, I can teach a few more advanced strokes and in the kayak, I can teach them to edge and turn the boat with less effort.

Simply messing about, however, is the best technique I know for teaching someone to enjoy canoes and kayaks.

Although yesterday turned out to be a beautiful sunny day, the morning started a bit cloudy with a small amount of overnight rain. We had planned to take the boats to the lake and didn’t let the weather deter us. I took the Old Town kayak and a small “Wee Lassie” canoe that I built myself. The Wee Lassie is big enough for me to take another person along, though it is really a solo canoe. Our eight year old grandson was eager to paddle the kayak. He had experience with the boat, having paddled it last year, so I made sure his life jacket was properly zipped up, let him sit in the boat and handed him the paddle. Then I launched the Wee Lassie and gave our two granddaughters rides around the lake. The older of our granddaughters later took a turn with the kayak, but we started out with her just riding in the canoe with me.



Of course you can't sit in the bottom of a shallow canoe with the water slipping by right next to you without putting your hand into the water and watching and feeling the effect of the water as your boat slips through it. Soon our granddaughter was laughing and splashing and encouraging me to go check out various things about the lake. The water lilies were just starting to bloom with their distinctive white flowers with the bright yellow centers. She liked the feel of the leaves in her hands and wanted to look at the flowers. "Grandpa, take a picture of this one!" she said over and over again. Back and forth to the shore I went, switching granddaughters and giving both rides.

Meanwhile our grandson was getting comfortable in the kayak and, for the most part, getting the kayak to go where he wanted. He is still fairly light, so he doesn't weigh enough to really edge the boat. He can turn by back paddling and by dragging a paddle in the water or by stroking on one side or the other of the boat. The boat, without much of a load, floats high in the water and so turns nimbly with him. Sometimes it seems to have a mind of its own and he would find himself going in a different direction than desired. A boat is a bit like a bike. It is easier to control when you have a bit of speed, but it is difficult to learn that and be confident. Nonetheless we had great fun paddling about and poking about the little lake which is net to their home.

We were, of course, pursuing something that was absolutely worth doing.

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July 29, 2019 – In Japan!

There is a real advantage to having the opportunity to return to a foreign country relatively close to the first visit. We are back in Japan after less than a year. It is a very usual set of circumstances for us. We have never made back-to-back trips to another country before. In a way our visit to Japan last year was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. We felt so fortunate to have that experience. This year we have returned because we have a new grandson here and we can't wait to meet him today. The trip will involve riding on Japan's fastest train and a connection to a short train ride to the town where our daughter and her family live.

This morning we are aware of how much things change and what a unique place Japan is.

Back in 2006, we had a wonderful sabbatical, funded by the Lily Endowment. One of the things that the sabbatical enabled was travel. We visited sacred sites in the United States and in Canada before flying to Australia for more sacred sites and a visit with colleagues and friends there. During the driving portion of our trip, we had a small family emergency that required a few phone calls to keep in touch with family members and help to support one another. Our cell phone service was spotty as we camped near the US-Canada border, not far from Glacier Park. I remember stopping alongside the road in a small town where we could get our cell phone to work and finally making contact. Later that same day, we found a second place where we could make a phone call after driving through miles of area where there was no cell phone service. Part of that experience was a higher than usual cell phone bill when we allowed our phone to roam for service and it connected with a tower located in Canada. We learned quite a bit from the experience.

Now, just 13 years later, our cell phone plan allows for us to use roaming data and voice connections. We have a travel plan that covers international trips. Yesterday, our son drove us across the Canadian border to Vancouver where we caught our flight to Tokyo. Our cell phone worked in Canada to send messages to our family. Then, upon arrival in Tokyo, the phone worked to help us find directions and make contact with our exchange daughter, with whom we had dinner last night. The presence of wireless internet on the train and in the train station allowed us to connect with her.

Returning after having been here last year helped with all of our connections. Our flight was a little late, due to many flights arriving at the Narita airport at the same time and our having to be sequenced into the arrivals pattern. From the airplane we took a bus to customs and immigration, where there was a huge number of people entering the country. Fortunately the Japanese immigration system works quickly and before long

we were through that process and on to pick up our train passes before boarding the express train to Tokyo. Having been in Tokyo station less than a year ago helped us find our connection with the local train to Ueno, where we met our exchange daughter. The local trains were very crowded, but we weren't intimidated by the crowds and our experience of last year gave us confidence to board the crowded train car and make the trip with a minimum of hassle.

After dinner, we found our hotel by using the cell phone as a moving map with directions. It had been a very long day for us. We finally made it to our hotel room 22 hours after we had gotten up in the morning. We both had a little sleep on the airplane, but not much.

Yes, we are in Japan. Our room has less bare floor space than our camper back home. And the bathroom is equally as small as the one in our camper. However, there is a high-tech toilet in the bathroom with a heated seat and various water jets for cleaning. The water faucet in the bathroom is another piece of high tech engineering, with dials to set the temperature and direct the flow. A single faucet supplies the sink and the shower and bathtub.

Our room consists of the bathroom, a corridor with a small desk and a small place to set a suitcase, and the area where the bed touches three walls of the room. But, this being Japan, there is a television mounted on the wall at the foot of the bed that is as wide as the bed itself. We aren't into watching television that much, but it is necessary to use the television to find out the Wifi password, instructions to use the heating/air conditioning controls and other information.

It will take us a while to get our sleep patterns adjusted to the new time zone, but we are buoyed by excitement. We've successfully navigated this much travel, we've remembered enough about using the trains to have gotten where we needed to go with a minimum of hassle. And today we get to meet our new grandson face to face for the first time. We are so excited to be with our daughter and her family.

Along the way we had a conversation about a family member who has become, as he ages, reluctant to travel. An experience with a cancelled flight left him nearly unwilling to travel by air. He doesn't like to drive long distances and a trip across the state to visit his daughter and her children seems like a big deal to him. He, like us, has a new grandson that he has not yet met because he didn't want to leave home. In contrast, we are reveling in the experience of travel and the excitement of our new grandchild. I can't imagine not making the trip. Family is so central to my life that the inconvenience of travel is a small price to pay for being together.

We are here and we feel blessed to be able to make this trip. There is a lot more to this story as it unfolds.

July 30, 2019 – Time Passes

The term “jet lag” is generically applied to the feeling of disorientation that comes from traveling across many time zones at a high speed. The reality may not be one of lag, but rather one of being ahead. However, we traveled across the International Time line on this trip, so we are literally ahead of the time to which our bodies were adjusted. Back home, it is nearly 11:30 am. Here it is 2:30 am the next day. Our bodies are adjusting fairly well. We maintained a nearly normal schedule yesterday with a couple of times of feeling tired during the day. Now we are having a bit of wakefulness in the middle of the night, but we'll be able to go back to sleep before long and rise at the normal time here.

The world didn't know much about jet lag before there were jets to allow for rapid travel. If you travel by ship or across land by car or another conveyance, the rate of travel allows your body to adjust while you travel. The whole phenomena of time zones is a fairly modern concept, adopted in the late 19th Century to accommodate train schedules and the need to have a system of time keeping that allowed it to be the same time in two different places. Prior to the adoption of the Universal Time Zone System, each place had its own time, drawn from observing the position of the sun in the sky. Humans have evolved and adapted over the eons to be daytime creatures, rising with the sun and retiring with its setting.

While we are not jet setters, we have enough experience with travel to know that we can adjust to time changes fairly easily and a couple of days of feeling a bit tired is all we need to endure when we make the big changes.

There is another kind of time lag that I have been experiencing in the last couple of days. It involves the kind of traveling through time that all of us make on this life's journey. Time passes. We age. We collect memories and sometimes those memories are very vivid and have an influence on the present.

The main business of yesterday, for us, was holding our new grandson. He is just two weeks old, so his days are filled with eating, sleeping, and having his diaper changed. The big events in his day yesterday were a ride in his stroller for an outside walk and a bath. His sleep cycles are based on his feeding. He has his diaper changed then he eats and when he is full he dozes. He could be put into his crib, but when grandparents are near by, we enjoy holding him as he dozes and he sleeps well in the arms of a parent or grandparent.

Holding that tiny baby sure brought to my mind the days of when our children were infants. The stories of his mother's infancy began to come to my mind. I would tell about some particular incident and she might ask a question or two and pretty soon I'd have

another story to tell. It isn't that I am confused about what time it is or how old she is or the presence of a grandson. It is just that those memories enrich this present experience.

I suspect that baby Patrick will one day find some of grandpa's stories to be boring. He'll probably also find a few of them to be interesting. Children like to hear stories of their parents and to think of their parents as children at certain stages of their own development.

The story of tiny babies and how they transform the lives of their families have been with our people for many generations. If you read through the Bible, you will find that there are a lot of stories about wanting babies, anticipating babies and having babies. We have a whole birth narrative of Jesus, but only a single story of his childhood. There are many other biblical characters whose stories are told without any detail of childhood years at all. Babies and adults seem to make up the bulk of the bible's narrative stories. And the stories of our people are filled with people longing for children and having to wait for children.

Grandparents get a unique perspective on children. It is, in part, a reward of a health care system that allows us to live longer. We get to see our grandchildren grow and mature. We carry direct memories of their parents' growing and maturing as well. This multi-generational perspective is valuable. Yes, our daughter is very tired, having to care for her baby every two or three hours, and catching her sleep in short snatches as her baby sleeps. But we know that this will not be a forever kind of tired. There are lots of parts of being a parent that involve not getting to sleep when you might otherwise do so, but the intensity of infant care starts to stretch out fairly quickly when viewed from the perspective of a grandparent. I remember waking with her in the middle of the night, but those times passed quickly in my memory. Before long she will start awake because her baby has slept longer than she expected and she'll check on him to make sure he is ok. Then, before long, he will sleep for six or seven hours. He'll begin to be awake in the daytime more and sleep more at night. Her life will resume a routine that is closer to her normal.

Time passes. We adjust. By tomorrow, I'll be able to stay up all day and participate in the usual activities without feeling tired. I won't even be able to remember quite what my jet lag felt like. In the larger human story, the span of a single lifetime isn't very much. It passes quickly and at each stage we have to pass the mantle from one generation to the next.

Actually the experience of jet lag and the appearance of memories of other times is quite pleasant. As I frequently say to my friends and others, "There's no down side to being a grandpa." That isn't quite true. The downside is that it all goes by so quickly that it sometimes makes my head spin. But I know these times are very precious and am able to treasure each moment that I am granted.

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July 31, 2019 – Misawa



When we travel, my journal turns into a bit of a travelogue. I haven't given up thinking about the life of being a pastor. In fact this morning's adventures include a visit to the Base Chapel and a meeting with one of the chaplains. But we enjoy traveling and we are having a lot of new experiences as we go, so it seems natural to write a bit about where we are and what we are doing.



What we are doing is simple for this trip. We are connecting with a new grandson and we are supporting our daughter and son in law as they begin the adventure of being parents and engage in the delicate balance of work and family life.

Where we are is an amazing place.

Misawa Air Base is approximately 400 miles north of Tokyo, on the northeastern part of the main island of Honshu. Misawa Air Base is located in Misawa city on the shores of Lake Ogawara in the Aomori Prefecture.

The base is home to US Air Force, Navy and Marines as well as Japan Air Defense Forces. The runways of the air base are also used by the Misawa Airport for regular commercial flights that connect Misawa to other parts of Japan.

The world's first non-stop Trans-Pacific flight was launched from the beach near Misawa on 4 October 1931. That particular flight didn't involve any airports. The plane took off from the beach and crash landed in the hills near Wenatchee, Washington 41 hours later. The Bellanca CH-400 was named Miss Veedol and was later repaired and sold. We have seen a replica of the airplane in the Misawa Aviation and Science Museum.

The air base dates back to the build up to World War II. The Imperial Japanese Army constructed a runway at Misawa in 1938. It was used by the Japanese Naval Air Force for training long range bomber crews, including some who participated in the attack on Pearl Harbor. Later the field was used to train Kamikaze flyers. In December of 1946, the United States established a permanent fighter base at Misawa and it has been a joint air base since. It is now home to the U.S. Air Force's 35th Fighter Wing.



The base sits on the shores of Lake Ogawara and is surrounded by beautiful and lush mountains. The small community of Misawa has a number of modern hotels and many shops and restaurants that cater to the personnel assigned to the base. During our visit last year we stayed in the home of our daughter on base. This year, with a new member of their family in their small apartment we are staying in a hotel. We have base passes that allow us to walk onto the base which is only a block from our hotel. Later in our visit we will be staying at the Navy hotel on base. It is a busy place with a lot of coming and going of military personnel.

From our daughter's home, we can walk to the shores of Lake Ogawara. They have a dog, so there is an excuse for taking walks and looking around at the setting.

When we think of Japan, one of the things that comes to our minds is the huge cities. Tokyo is one of the most crowded places I have ever visited. One day last year we sat in a cafe overlooking a busy intersection and were entertained by the huge crush of humanity that crossed in every direction. It is hard for us to imagine living with so many people so close at hand. Although most of Japan's people are crowded into its large cities, the country is mostly mountains and rural areas. Misawa is smaller than Rapid City, with less than 40,000 people. It is surrounded by farm fields and is sandwiched between Lake Ogawara and the Pacific Ocean.

It is hot and humid here this summer, which is typical for a town located between two large bodies of water. In the winter the area is known for heavy snowfalls. The result is lush forest vegetation with lots of ferns under the tall cedar, fir and hemlock trees. Although it is warmer in the summer, it is not unlike the climate of the area where our son lives in Washington State not far from the Puget Sound.



For American tourists, there is much that is new and very interesting. We are enjoying Japanese breakfasts, with fish and rice and vegetables as well as eggs and sausage and pastries. We commented to one another yesterday morning at breakfast that we definitely weren't at the "Continental" breakfast of a US hotel chain with its waffle machines and sweet cereals. A walk down the street takes us by small shops that are very different from US retail businesses. And we are surrounded by people who speak a language that we do not speak and only a few words are known by us. The result is very exotic and exciting for us.

We have the advantage of having visited less than a year ago, so some of the challenges of travel aren't so intimidating as they were the first time we visited. We are more at home traveling by train and exploring the area. Japan is a very safe country to visit and people are warm and gracious towards guests. The exchange rate between US dollars and Japanese Yen is just over 100 yen per dollar, which makes it easy to understand prices and know how much money you are spending. Drop a couple of zeros from the price and the 1200 yen item costs about \$12. Cash is the preferred payment method in restaurants and shops, though there are many places where credit cards are welcome. It is easy to use our US bank cards to obtain cash from ATM machines, located in most convenience stores and at several locations on the air base.

Our grandparent duties are the main reason for this trip, but we will be traveling out and visiting the area in the days to come. It promises to be a grand adventure.

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