



SOUTHSIDE MIDWEEK NEWSLETTER 8.05.20

The Unsinkable Paddle – Barrett

One year ago today, Karen and I traveled with our children to Croatia in order to participate in a Christian family camp. We made many incredible memories and have told and retold the stories from that experience many times over the last twelve months. One of our favorite ones to tell is the story of the unsinkable paddle. It was one of those moments that even though it caused me pain at the time, I knew one day would be looked back upon with laughter. We flew into the airport at Munich, Germany and then traveled by train to Croatia. Therefore, we were able to visit some places in Austria and Slovenia along the way. Upon our return trip to the airport, we stopped for a day at Lake Bled, Slovenia. It is a picturesque lake surrounded by the Julian Alps. The medieval Bled Castle overlooks the lake and there is a small island at the center of the lake where a church is located. It is one of the most beautiful places I have ever been. During our only morning there, we rented four stand up paddleboards for two hours so our kids could paddle around on the lake. Karen and I enjoyed a morning on the shore with our cups of coffee, while the kids had a blast exploring the lake together.

The picture on this page was taken prior to their going onto the lake. You will notice in JP's hand is a paddle. It may look like a normal paddle to you, but we were told by the lady at the rental desk that this was no ordinary paddle. In fact, it was an "unsinkable" paddle. It was made of a special kind of material that simply could not be sunk in water. The paddles were brand new to this rental company and they were obviously very excited about them and wanted us to fully appreciate the technological advances that our children were getting to experience by using their equipment. Well, I am certain many hours of testing went into determining that a product could be given this designation, however the makers of this paddle had never met William Coffman. My youngest son took it upon himself to see if the paddle could live up to its name. While on the lake, he repeatedly placed the paddle vertically under the water and attempted to push it down to the bottom of the lake. The first several times he did this, the paddle would go down and then come rushing back to the surface showing William both its buoyancy and resiliency. However, even an "unsinkable" paddle evidently has a breaking point. The new technology had met its match. On the final attempt, William pushed down the paddle with all of his might and watched as it continued downward out of sight never to return to the surface.



I share that story with you as an analogy for our current situation. The last 5 months of this year have been very difficult for many people. The unknowns and the uncertainties have weighed all of us down to some degree. As one woman admitted to me the other day, the self-isolation has been good for her physically but terrible for her psychologically. When I ask someone at Trader Joe's how they are doing during this time, a common response I have received is "I'm staying afloat" or "I'm keeping my head above water." Well, it's ok to feel that way for a short time; but it's not a good place to be for a long period of time because no one is "unsinkable." The body of Christ exists to encourage and support one another. If during this time, you feel like you are about to sink, then please reach out to your church family. I think many times, we do not want to bother others or seem like we are complaining too much. Also, I think it is our tendency to act like we have it all together, but no one is unsinkable. Please be sure to reach out if you need help or simply need to talk to someone. You were not created to go through this time alone.

Compassion – Kevin

Today's endangered quality is compassion. Sometimes compassion is hard to find, both around us and within us. Do you remember back in 2014 when Dr. Kent Brantley contracted Ebola in Liberia, though the US was the best place for him to be treated, many voices protested his return out of fear of infection? That response seemed to lack compassion. What comes to your mind as you think of times when compassion appeared to be on the endangered list, or even extinct?

When compassion shows up in our Bibles, it is never without action. Jesus showed compassion to the confused, harassed, diseased, hungry, guilty, untouchable, forgotten, grieving, broken and sin-sick. One of my favorite Jesus stories occurs in John 5. As Jesus was walking on the road to Jerusalem, he saw a handicapped man who had been disabled for 38 years. Just think how many people had walked by this guy over the past 38 years. Think of how few never noticed him, never asked him a question, cared what he thought, where he'd been, what happened to him. Just think how nearly no one had ever stopped, stooped, and stared into his eyes, held his hand, treated him with any dignity. Jesus did all of these things, and his life was changed. He could not help but have compassion for this man who had been cast off by most everyone else around him until Jesus found him.

Henri Nouwen writes, "Compassion is where ministry and spirituality touch each other." Spirituality grows out of time with God, through solitude. Ministry grows out of time with people in the marketplace, through relationships. If you hole up, stay secluded, or hang with the same people all the time, you risk never developing a heart of compassion. If you choose not to make time for God, no time for quietness, for solitude, for listening, you risk never developing a heart of compassion.

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NIV 84) Take a moment and write this message out in your own words. Think about how God has shown compassion to you. Think back on the times when you showed compassion to someone. Why did you make that choice? Compassion is at the heart of the gospel; it's a core value in the Kingdom; and it's a prime characteristic of Jesus. Do your best to guard against compassion being an endangered quality in your heart.

A Shepherd's Prayer – Dennis

As Diane and I continue to stay close to home thus far during the pandemic, I notice lots of little opportunities to grumble. I actually miss going to the grocery store in person. We have missed the enjoyment of a meal in a restaurant. We have chosen to skip some opportunities to visit our grandkids. I miss the church experience we enjoyed prior to mid-March.

Then I realize I have unwittingly become one more illustration for Kevin's recent sermon on gratitude. My little troubles are the most trivial of inconveniences given everything going on in the world and in the lives of the people around me; but even that observation misses the deeper truth. Even if some of my genuine needs are unmet, am I not grateful for the many people who love me and care about me? This leads right into our current study in 1 Peter where we are reminded of the truly important things that we can never lose: adoption as children of God, sons and daughters of the King. I have every spiritual blessing available to me and a glorious inheritance kept for me in heaven until the time is right.

Father, in times of ease and in times of stress and hardship and uncertainty, fill us by your Spirit with gratitude again and again. Remind us of the bountiful blessings you shower on us. We want to bless those around us and bring honor and glory to you by the way we show gratitude. Thank you for always hearing our prayer.