

Proverbs 30:1-4

Thus says the man: I am weary, O God, I am weary, O God. How can I prevail? Surely I am too stupid to be human; I do not have human understanding. I have not learned wisdom, nor have I knowledge of the holy ones. Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in the hollow of the hand? Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is the person's name? And what is the name of the person's child? Surely you know!

Acts 3:1-10

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, 'Look at us.' And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, 'I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.' And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. All the people saw him walking and praising God, and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

“In and Out of the Fog”

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In Tiburon, California, there's a place, it's just north of San Francisco, and the sailboats come out in Tiburon there and sometimes they're just on their own, sailing across the bay, but sometimes they race each other, usually early evening, and as they race across over to the skyline of San Francisco, as you watch them, if you're on the Tiburon side, and you're just kind of watching them go across the water, they kind of fade out of sight. You can't see them. All of a sudden they're in a fog. It's a low cloud that hangs there, that hovers between the tall buildings and the water and the sailboats go in, and pretty soon, if you're patient enough, you see them returning. They make a turn and they come back, and they come in and out of the fog. In and out of the fog, just like we do, it seems to me, and a lot of the way life is for is. Because sometimes I'm not sure we have it all figured out. Well, I don't have it all figured out, as you'll find out this morning. And maybe you can join with me on some of that because it seems to me that our visibility, just like the fog, gets very limited, and sometimes not just with our eyes, but our visibility gets limited with our hearts and with our minds.

Life's weather forecast calls for periods of patchy fog, and in one particular area, it's how we see God, how we understand God to be in our lives, and how we are in God's live. Here we have Peter and John, and they're at the gate of a temple. And they go in there every day to pray, and also on the outside of that temple sits a man who is lame from birth, and every day his friends bring him and set him down there at that temple gate and

he begs. He begs for alms. Alms, it could mean anything. It could mean money, it could mean healing, it could mean food, water, but he begs every day. And so Peter and John, as they start to go by him, as you listened to Maxine read to us this morning, they intently look at him. And there he is on the side of the temple, and he's looking up to them, "Alms," and they kneel down. And I can picture Peter looking right into his eyes, intensely, and I can almost picture him cupping that man's face in his hands, and Peter says, "We do not have any gold. We don't have any silver. But we do have something else. We have a man named Jesus. We have a message. We have love, and that's what we offer you. Now, stand up and walk." And all of a sudden they reach their arms out, each of them, John, Peter, they grab the man's arms, pull him up, and he starts, as the choir sang, leaping, ye lame, for joy. And he starts bouncing around. His ankles are strong. He runs into the temple, he's bouncing into the temple, and all of these people that have carried him day after day after day, see him, and they are amazed.

They are amazed, and so am I. And I bet you are too. Because I've been at that temple gate, and I've placed my hands up, and I said "Alms, alms for healing, for friends, for family." I've raised my arms up and so have you. To heal the fragmented relationships that people have in their families. Find somebody a job who's worked twenty years and got laid off. I've put my arms in the air, and so have you. We've been at that temple gate. Take care of that aging person whose mind is starting to fade, they don't think clearly any more. Alms. Kyle Keller was at that gate. I met Kyle Keller earlier this summer. I was visiting my youngest daughter in Lawrence, she has a day care, and Kyle Keller came and brought his little girl to day care. He walked in, and I met him, said "Hi" and when he left Marybeth, my daughter, came up and said, "Dad, I want to tell you about Kyle Keller. Kyle Keller is on the coaching staff of the Kansas University basketball team. But he hasn't always been there. He at one time coached at Oklahoma State University with Eddie Sutton." And she said, "Do you remember when Oklahoma State University came out to play the University of Colorado a few years ago, and the two planes they were on as they returned, one of them crashed, and many of the players were killed, and some of the staff." And she said, "Kyle Keller, just before the plane left, Eddie Sutton came up to him and said, "I want you to switch planes. I want you to ride with me, so we can talk about the game." And so he went to his cousin, and he said, "Would you mind switching planes?" His cousin said, "Sure." Kyle Keller got on the plane that made it safely, and a few hours later, Kyle was at the temple. He was at the gate, and he was trying to explain to an aunt and an uncle why their son died in that plane crash and Kyle was alive to talk about it.

Now, Peter and John said, "We're going to give you Jesus." It seems kind of foggy to me. All of it seems kind of foggy and hazy, but he said, "We're going to give you Jesus." A few weeks ago, early in the summer, the choir sang, "Ride on, King Jesus." And I also remember that night we practiced. We didn't do very well, and I remember we struggled and struggled and struggled, and finally James looked at us and he said, "What I want you to do is emphasize "Jesus." Emphasize Jesus. Maybe that's it. Maybe that's it. Except, you know what? I think Jesus sometimes was kind of foggy about stuff. I mean, my goodness, friends, he hung out in a garden for hours, saying to God, "I don't want to die.

Let the cup pass from me. I don't want to die." And he grappled with that until finally he was able to say, "Okay, it's not up to me. It's not up to me."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian, pacifist, preacher, known for his radical obedience says, "You know, when we pray, oftentimes when we pray is when we've exhausted all of our human effort. And then we pray." It's like taking this hand that represents hopelessness and putting it with this hand that represents hopefulness, and we put them together. But it's sometimes kind of foggy. Sometimes, we're in and out of the fog on that, and where God is in our lives, and where we are in each others' lives as well. Now, I am also a little bit foggy about values. You know, the values, that stuff that's down deep inside of us that teaches us and reminds us what we think and what we feel and how we behave. Those are our values. They guide us. What we think, what we feel, and how we behave. Those are our values. But you know, sometimes they get a little foggy.

Now, I'm going to tell you one that got foggy for me, and I've really debated whether to say this to you, but I did it at 8:00 and I felt a little bit of a catharsis, like I released a little bit of something inside of me as I did this. So I'm going to try it again. I was doing a training over in Boulder, and it was noon. So I went to get something to eat by myself. And as I came upon this restaurant, is said, "The world's best malts." The world's best malts. And I thought, "Not true. I make the world's best malts." I have a little Hamilton Beach mixer, and I stir up a malt you wouldn't believe. I taste it as I go along, I mean, that's for me, of course. So I went in, and I thought, "I'll give them a chance. I'll order a big one." So I ordered a large chocolate malt and a salad. And I went through the line, and as I got up to the line, she said, "Here is your large malt," and I said, "Thank you," and she said, "Your salad's not ready, we'll call you. What's your name?" I said, "David." She said, "We'll call your name." So I went back to the table, I drank as I was walking, I thought "This isn't very good. This is not good ice cream, it's too thin. It costs way too much money."

But I drank it, all but about that much of my large cup. And I went and sat at the back, and pretty soon she says, "David," and I went up, and she says, "Here's your salad." I said "Thank you," and I reached out and got my salad, and she said, "And your medium-size chocolate malt." And I took it. I took it, and I turned around, and started to walk back, and I thought, "Wait a minute. I didn't.. this isn't.." It was just kind of a reaction. But you know how we justify, and we rationalize our values, and I said as I walked back to the table, "It's not that good anyway." And I also said, "You know what, they'd have to throw it out, because I've touched it." So I held on to that malt, and I sat down, and to show you that I was so clear in my thinking, I poured that malt into my large cup and threw the medium cup away, and I sat there and thought "I don't think this is the right thing to do" and my mother was up here just talking to me like crazy, pounding away, and all of a sudden as I'm eating the salad and feeling yucky and shaking that malt and knowing it's not right, all of a sudden a fellow up at the counter says, "Where's my medium size chocolate malt." And the woman says, "That guy back there has your malt." "Oh, no, he's got a large one." All right! And it just got worse and worse.

Come on, you young people have been there. Yeah, thank you. And so I went back up there and said, "I have to tell you something." I said, "Let me tell you what happened to me," and can you imagine trying to explain that to somebody in the middle of their busy noon hour? She just looked at me and said, "Well, you know what. It'll just be three dollars and seventy-five cents more, and everything's okay." I thought, "Wait a minute, that's what the large one is. This is a medium..." But I'm in no position to bargain with these people. I paid her. Seven dollars and fifty cents now, for a malt that I didn't like. I felt funny about it, and besides that, as I went and sat down I thought, "They even know my name." And I couldn't get out of there fast enough. I dumped the malt, I threw the salad, I thought, "This is awful." And I walked out of there and hustled back over to teach the rest of my class on ethics.

And I felt just like that guy that wrote in Proverbs, what did he say? "I feel so stupid." I feel like I don't understand life. I wonder about my value system. I thought, "Wow, David, you knew better. What is this all about? We compromise, we justify." And I thought, "I'm just like that person." And you know what that person in Proverbs even said? "All right, God, I don't understand who I am. I don't understand why I function the way I do, but I'll tell you what. I'm going to ask you four questions. Why don't you tell me about the earth? Maybe that will help me understand myself a little more. Did you create the ends of the earth?" said the writer in Proverbs. "What about wind? Did you hold the wind in the hollow of your hand? What about fire? You know, that symbolic place between heaven and earth, what about fire? And what about the water? Tell me God, tell me all about that." Peter knew the answer to that. Peter the rock. Not the Peter at the gate. Not the Peter at the gate of the temple, but Peter the rock at the Crow Creek Reservation. The Lakota Indian that met with a bunch of these young people, and some of us adults, he looked at us and he said, "Welcome to the Mother Earth." He said, "You've come to the place where the suicide rate is the highest in the United States, you've come to the county where the poverty is the worst. You've also come to a place where the longevity for people that live here is 44 years for a man and 47 years for a woman. You've come to a place," he said, "where we get up at three o'clock in the morning and drive 48 miles to go shop at a Walmart so people won't stare at us from the reservation." Peter the rock knew. He said, "Thank you for fixing up our roofs, and building our ramps, so people wouldn't have to take wheelchairs down steps, thank you for washing jars so we could can food, thank you for painting and reconditioning homes, thank you for playing at the Boys and Girls Club," a dilapidated old building. Outside there's a field where you play kickball with rocks that were big. "Thank you," he said.

Our values, all of us, I know, our values were shaken by that. Who are we? Then he said, "Come to the powwow. Come to our powwow." And we went. And he called us out in the middle of the field, as we were watching the elders and the children and all those people, men and women, ages in between, as they were dancing, and he called us to the middle of the field and he said, "I want to let you all know," he said to everybody at the powwow, "We have two groups here, a group from Fort Collins, Colorado, and a group from South Carolina," a youth group we had joined with. We all were joining together with our sponsors. And he said, "I want to thank them because they're beautiful people." Remember that? He said it twice. "These are beautiful people," he said. And then he

invited us to dance, to dance, and we did. We got out there, remember? Kind of like that. And as we were dancing, I was out there by myself, everybody was dancing around me, and all of a sudden somebody looped my arm. It was my daughter. She's one of the sponsors of the Simpsonville, South Carolina group, and she looped my arm and we started dancing and Elizabeth all of a sudden looped my other arm, my granddaughter from South Carolina, the three of us, three generations, are dancing up there, all asking ourselves the same question. All asking ourselves about our values, how we fit in this group. What are we doing here? Can we make a difference? And I realized as I was dancing there with all of you, that I cannot change history. I cannot change what happened in the past. I cannot alter the fact that those Lakota Indians were in Minnesota but now they're in South Dakota. I cannot change the fact that the Trail of Tears occurred, and there were people that died along the trail all the way to Oklahoma, because they were sick and diseased. I cannot change the fact of what happened at Wounded Knee, because a deaf Indian didn't hear the command to put his rifle down, and a massacre took place. I cannot change that, or alter that, and as we danced I thought of that. And then I thought about what I can do, and what all of us can do. Weigh our values. Get in touch with who we are, and love people, love them, seek peace with each other, and with those on that reservation. Seek unity and caring. Yeah, I can do that. So can you. And as we walked away from the reservation that night, where the powwow was held, I thought of the phrase "Dance as if no one is watching, dance as if nobody's watching," and we did. And I thought of the phrase, "Love like you've never been hurt. Love like you've never been hurt," and they did.

My friends, life's weather forecast calls for periods of patchy fog, in the way we see God in our lives, in the way we embrace our values, and weigh them, but don't forget, Dietrich Bonhoeffer says from his prison cell he said, "You have to immerse yourself into all of life. You have to immerse yourself into every single piece of life. Illness, sickness, complexities, hurt, pain, joy, transitions, passages. You immerse yourself in all of life, because then, and only then, will we find ourselves, find ourselves cradled in the arms of a loving God. Amen.