

RUSSELL KNEW THE WAY TO WHERE HE WAS GOING
Jn 14:1-6; Russell Rosenau Funeral; March 20, 2019

Several years ago our congregation started a children's offering, which we call the "noisy offering" because it is collected in a large steel kettle in front of church. While the general offering is being collected by the ushers, little children are invited to come forward and drop their coins into the kettle, which makes some noise. Most of the kids bringing up an offering like the noise it makes, but some of them carefully place their coins in the bottom to keep it quiet.

Something that used to baffle me was when the ushers would come forward at the late service, and they would pour out a whole bunch of change from the kettle, but no kids had put in a noisy offering that service. Where did all those coins come from? I found out a few weeks ago. Russ, who often arrived around the time I was about done shaking hands after the early service, came with his bag full of coins that he had been saving, and emptied them quietly into the kid's offering. I'm sure he still gave his regular offering, which we kept track of, but he secretly gave some we couldn't track. I guess 94 isn't too old to act like a child.

This reminds me of something Mark told me about his dad. Growing up, he didn't see his dad practice his daily devotional, but that was because he didn't get up early enough in the morning. Later in life Mark saw his dad pray daily early in the morning. Russ must have taken to heart what Jesus taught about prayer in the Sermon on the Mount. **When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret.** (Mt. 6:6). Russ's daily prayers were done in secret much like his not-so-noisy "noisy offering."

It's fun to watch the faces of the little kids bringing up their noisy offerings. They have such joyful looks, and they are excited. Some of them even run or skip to the front of the church. If only adults were as excited and joyful to give an offering as those kids. You know why the kids are so happy to give the offering, don't you? It's not their money they are giving, but what their fathers and mothers have given them to give. If it were their own money, would they be as happy to give it? But that's the point. Christians joyfully give what their heavenly Father first gave them.

What is true about our offerings is true about everything we have as Christians, especially our salvation. We are justified by faith and have access to grace through our Lord Jesus Christ. There is nothing for us to be “noisy” about when it comes to our faith, except what God has given us. It’s not about us and what we have done, or how faithful we have been. Our trust is in God’s faithfulness to us in Jesus Christ and what He has done to save us.

St. Paul makes this very point in Romans five. **For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

Every time we gather for a funeral we are reminded just how weak we are as sinners. Admitting weakness is not something we like to do. We feel ashamed of our weaknesses, often to the point of trying to hide them or pretending we are strong. We are afraid to show weaknesses because there are those around who will use that to take advantage of us. Trying to hide our weakness from God – as if that were possible – or claiming we are not weak in sin, threatens our salvation. When we think like that, we need to sing again the children’s hymn: “I am weak, but He is strong; yes, Jesus loves me.”

The amazing thing about how weak and dying sinners are saved is that Jesus came in humility, took on our weaknesses in His body, suffered and died for us. When we are struggling with our weakness, wishing and praying them away, we need to remember what Jesus said to St. Paul: **“My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore [Paul could say in faith,] I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.** (1 Co 12:9)

Russ never seemed to exhibit any weaknesses to me. It was Norma who was the one who got sick and went to the hospital, not Russ. It was Russ who maintained the home and yard. It was Russ who cleared snow off the driveway and walks, not just for his home, but for his elderly neighbors. It was Russ who maintained his independence, demonstrated in his ability to drive great distances.

One of his favorite pastimes was to tell stories about how, when he still worked for the gas company, he would get calls at all hours and in all kinds of bad weather, take off in his company car and get there to take care of whatever emergency it was. With a gleam in his eye and a wry smile on his face, he would say how far he had to drive and how long it took him. If I did the math correctly, he claimed to average about 100 miles per hour, and not always on good roads. He said he had arrangements with the county sheriff's departments to do this. Russ knew where he was going and how to get there in a hurry. (God's angels must have worked overtime protecting him.)

Russ also knew the Way to where he was going in an eternal sense. Unlike Thomas, who said, "**Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?**" Russ knew Jesus, who went the way of the cross for him, died, and rose to prepare a place for him in His Father's house. Russ knew his own body would die one day, but Jesus would return to raise him from the dead and take him to be with Him in glory forever. Russ knew Jesus to be the Way to the Father, and walked on that way throughout his life.

In the last verse of Psalm one, our Old Testament Reading for today, the psalmist comments on the two ways people can go in life.

**For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.**

This psalm served as the sermon text for George Rosenau, Russ's father. God's righteous ones delight in His Word and are like trees planted by streams living water. They endure in difficult times, bear fruit and prosper. **The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.** George's family was reminded that they needed to follow the way of the righteous, like their father had in his life, so they would not follow the way of the wicked and perish.

This is an encouragement that every generation needs to hear. To quit hearing of God's Word in Jesus Christ and the receiving of the forgiveness of sins in Word and Sacrament is to go the way of the wicked. Every Christian father and grandfather wants his children and grandchildren to know and walk in the way of the righteous their whole lives. Russ knew the Way to where he was going, and has now arrived safely. May God keep all of you on that Way, the Way of life and faith in Jesus Christ, the Way of the righteous. Amen.