

I've been ruined

#1 - 6

2013-10-19

I've been ruined #1,

Hi all,

I was invited by an Episcopal (Anglican) priest to teach a house church conference in his Episcopal church, which I thought was a strange, but I went anyway. When I walked into that church with its rich woodwork, orderly pews, altar and the eternal flame up front, memories of my childhood flooded back to me in rapid fire succession like a movie trying to show years of a person's life in a matter of seconds.

It's all I knew

"That flame is the presence of the Lord", was mom's answer to my question of, "What is that red candle on the wall by the altar?", as we walked across the back of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Kokomo, Indiana.

I was probably 8 years old if that, and mom was introducing us to church for the first time. As she answered, I was trying to wrap my mind around God living in that building, right there behind the altar, with us just THAT close to Him, while also thinking I could walk up there and blow the candle out - then what would happen to the universe? Would I be struck dead? I didn't want to think about it.

Part of me wanted to run outside and stop passing cars with the great news that God lived in the church building RIGHT THERE! Part of me wondered why, if this was real, weren't others running out and stopping passing cars with this exciting news? Something didn't make sense, I thought to myself.

St. Andrew's was my introduction to Christianity and church life. We went to church, genuflected before entering our pew, to give respect to Jesus or something, and settled in. In my mind we always made a scene when we went to church each Sunday - 4 kids each born 2 years apart so we looked like perfect stair steps - and everyone turned to see dad lead the way, then mom, then we 4 in birth order.

Older women would smile while I cringed inside. Someone patted me on the head once and I offered a look I thought was part snarling dog and part 'Yes, I know we're cute and we'll make the most of it at fellowship hour to get an extra donut'.

Things changed, but didn't

Dad left our family when I was 11 1/2 years old, but mom kept taking us to church each week. The divorce is what drove mom to seek the Lord, and she found Him and the Baptism with the Holy Spirit. Soon, she and her best friend in church were pushing our priest to allow tongues and (heaven forbid), a guitar in worship!

I didn't know all the infighting that was going on. I knew the liturgy loosened up a bit, allowing a pause at places in the liturgy for members of the congregation to speak out loud their prayer requests. It was scary to a kid because like any traditional church, we were all in pews facing forward, so you never knew where a loud voice was going to come from - behind and right, front and left, the end of your own pew (how embarrassing to be on the same row with someone who spoke out a prayer request!).

I felt like a Londoner in a bomb shelter during the Battle of Britain, never knowing where some bomb would explode. Some people barely whispered while others practically yelled. It was unnerving. And the liturgy changed from thee and thine to you and yours, so that was suddenly very strange, yet familiar.

But everything else stayed the same - we entered in stair step order - except dad was missing which made me feel conspicuous. Then the processional, then we'd look at the board on the wall up front that had hymn numbers which were sung in the posted order, (the younger kids left after worship to go to Sunday school), followed by a 20 minute homily with exactly 1 joke, then the ceremony around Communion, receiving Communion in the long lines as pew by pew went forward, then the

recessional, then to the donuts downstairs for 'fellowship hour'. Sunday after Sunday, the order never varied.

Gong show

Even then I had a desire to find out about God, and Father Cooper was very good during Confirmation classes stirring our 12 year old minds with the unfathomable. I remember a whole class was spent answering the question of where the very first atom came from. Could it exist by chance, or was it Created?

One other thing I remember about Confirmation. When the Sunday came for our class to be Confirmed, one of the girls in the class who was also a friend of mine, Margaret, had brought her next door neighbor and best friend to watch us get Confirmed.

I stumbled over the stairs and my words upon meeting her that day. She recalled later I was a chubby, clumsy, red headed kid with buck teeth, in an ugly green wool suit and there was NO WAY she would give me more than a passing greeting. I thought she was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen, and especially liked her blunt transparency and ornery streak with a touch of mischievousness. Little did she know that within 3 1/2 years she would 'go steady' with that chubby red headed kid who had stretched to 6' 6" tall, got his teeth straightened, his hair turned blonde, and within 7 years he would ask her to marry him.

Father

In my teen years I was searching for a father though that desire had yet to gel and become fully defined in my mind. I was searching, I just didn't know what for. So I became an altar boy, and acolyte. I think 2 of us served each Sunday, marching in the processional and recessional with Father Cooper, and assisting with the Lord's Supper and ringing the bell at the right time.

The right time to ring that bell was when Father Cooper was preparing the Lord's Supper, and he would kneel down and strike his chest with his fist 3 times, saying, 'Lord, I am not worthy', 'Lord, I am not worthy', 'Lord, I am not worthy', and then the altar boy was to hit the gong after each statement of being unworthy - not too loud so as to make someone pee their pants in the congregation, but not so soft that old Mrs. Whoever couldn't hear what was going on. It was hard to get it exactly right.

The trouble was, we were all kneeling over at the time, supposed to be looking forward and down, and I never could anticipate the timing of the 'I am not worthy' thump on his chest. At various times the congregation heard 'Lord, I am GONG....a pause to let the echo fade...not worthy', and other times the bell wouldn't be hit at all because my mind was drifting off to donuts or how hot it was or something like that.

Didn't fit in, even then

That was the first time I realized I didn't fit into church life. No matter how familiar the routine became, I felt no connection to any of it. God - I thought He was worth checking into - but none of the rest of it seemed to fit me, nor I, it. All I did in church got me no closer to Him, but it was all I knew at the time.

The big change in my life came in 1974 when a girl in German class, Janny, a Roman Catholic believer, would tell me about the Lord in between language exercises. I had scoffed at my mom's faith, but Janny was different - she told me of situations she and her boyfriend (her future husband) would encounter, how they prayed, and how the Lord answered those prayers. She didn't preach at me as mom did, she just opened her heart to talk of walking through teenage life in faith.

When I mentally tracked 7 answered prayers in a row I decided that was proof enough that Jesus and God the Father in particular could be personal. I went home and reasoned it out - if Jesus has the last word in my life, then if I lived for Him, no matter what other people thought of me and my faith, or how they hated me or spoke evil of me, if He would have the last word it only made sense to serve Him now. On that basis I 'asked Him into my heart' - told Him I believed He was God, and He could have my life if He wanted it. (Though I sincerely doubted He'd take me up on that offer). Then I started talking to the Father.

Prayer meetings

Janny's boyfriend had led her to the Lord, Janny led me, then I led my girlfriend - the pretty girl I saw at Confirmation 3 1/2 years earlier, to the Lord. They started discipling Barb and I though I didn't know that's what they were doing. They were just being friends, taking us to a Saturday night prayer meeting out at a farm house, talking about the Lord at Pizza Hut afterwards...and in those German classes. They even took us for a drive out into the country one day where we found a spot on someone's lawn, sat in a circle holding hands, and prayed that Barb and I might receive the Baptism with the Holy Spirit. And we did.

The Saturday night 'prayer meeting' as we called it back then, was a weekly home gathering of Spirit-filled believers from all sorts of backgrounds, but full of love and joy and pureness for the Lord. The worship had the 1970's musical instrument, the auto-harp, which must have been a required instrument in some unspoken Charismatic Renewal rule or something because autoharps were ALWAYS in meetings back then.

We would worship until we could worship no more. We studied the Bible, someone had a lesson, there was prayer for anyone who wanted it, and if the whole night was spent in worship or maybe praying for something or someone in attendance, so be it, that must be what the Lord wants so out with man's plan, let God be God.

It was there I saw my first miracle. The hosts for those meetings had a farm dog, a German Shepherd, who got kicked by a horse or cow so that a tooth was dangling by a mere strand of tissue and his mouth was swollen and other teeth misplaced by the force of the kick.

After removing our hands from his muzzle the mouth and tooth that had been so damaged a couple minutes earlier, was now completely normal, with the canine tooth that had been dangling, now firmly back in place - and off the dog ran to be play, completely healed!

The start of being ruined

I remember going back to St. Andrew's Episcopal Church after the Baptism with the Holy Spirit, after some of those Saturday prayer meetings, and reading the liturgy with shock and surprise - "Hey, this stuff is scriptural!" I said to myself. The Nicene Creed and Apostle's Creed were correct! I had never seen that before. I was amazed the Episcopalians had so much of the core belief correct.

And then the rest of the service proceeded...and the uncomfortable feeling you get when you don't fit in and you think everyone can see or sense that about you came roaring back. I wanted to be back at our Saturday night prayer meetings! I wanted to tell them they don't need all these trappings. They don't need the robes, the incense, the 3 dings of the bell, the stained glass!

I was on my way to being ruined...but I had another 25 years to go before I fully realized it. More next week on what ruined me. Blessings,
John Fenn
Remember to email me cwowi@aol.com

2013-10-26

I've been ruined #2,

Hi all,

When I was growing up we had an aquarium full of tropical fish. My mom knew what species each one was, and I remember looking in reference books where they originally came from - their origins sounded exotic and I wondered about their home waters.

At another time we had 'sea monkeys' - a product of the 1960's and early '70's that was very popular for a time. I think sea monkeys were brine shrimp that hatched once placed in water, but whoever marketed them as 'sea monkeys' must have made a fortune because nearly every house with kids bought some at one time or another. Later mom would have a salt water tank and had several sea horses and other sea life.

And then...

My first snorkeling experience was at a gravel pit turned public swim area called France Park. Everyone

called France Park 'The cliffs', because the big challenge was to climb over the fence boundary and jump off the cliffs which ranged from a few feet to near 100. While snorkeling there I saw fish for the first time in their natural environment, and I was amazed and felt sorry for the ones in our little tank at home.

Then I went snorkeling in the Florida Keys among coral reefs when I was about 17 and saw cousins of those aquarium fish in the wild. WOW! The colors and their interactions with each other in their natural environment was hugely impacting to me - the life those fish led compared to the fish in our tank was very different though each swam in water, found food, and went about life. Over the years I've snorkeled again in the Keys, the US Virgin Islands, and Hawaii, and each time I come away amazed at the Lord's imagination and creativity - and a touch of sorrow for all aquarium fish everywhere.

The church aquarium

Last week I shared my spiritual upbringing in the Episcopal church on Sunday mornings, as well as my involvement in Saturday night prayer meetings attended by other suddenly Spirit-filled Episcopalians, Catholics, Baptists and Methodists in the 'charismatic renewal' time of the 1970's.

To me, the Episcopal church was the little aquarium tank at home and my Saturday night prayer meeting was like the open ocean. I wondered if the fish trapped inside wondered what life could be like in a world not needing all that life support equipment. What if they could swim in a place where no water pump or filter was needed? What if they didn't need a bubble blower to put air into the water? What if they didn't need The Giant Hand to drop flakes of food to them each morning? What if there was no liturgy, no schedule, no altar or even building called 'church'?

Love God, but...

Some, like my mom, loved the history, ritual, and predictability of the Episcopal church. Routine meant safe, and she wouldn't dream of going outside that 'aquarium'. She loved the Lord, but remained a smoking, drinking, tongue talking Episcopalian the rest of her life. I inherited her Bibles when she died, and found she wrote in the margins of her Bibles just like I do - and her notes were deep thoughts and revelation - much to my surprise. But she loved that fish tank called St. Andrew's Episcopal church. Good for her and for any who feel the Lord has them in a traditional church as my mom did. I find no fault.

Her traditional church affirmed her in those ways. After the divorce she needed the routine of each Sunday, the stability, the history and feeling she was part of something old in which each ritual was a reflection of some deeper spiritual truth. But swimming in the spiritual open ocean affirms a person in a different way. Not in ritual and routine, choirs and music, but in freedom to go where God wants to go in a meeting, to participate, to be connected to people. And so for me, I kept thinking about those fish...

What if they could swim free among the coral reefs? Yes, I'd been ruined, I had not only seen what it was like outside the spiritual tank, I had swum in the open ocean!

All that I've said thus far, has come after years of reflection and life experience. At the time, I just kept my thoughts to myself out of respect for my mom, but my thoughts were amazingly close to that of a TV character in the popular (US) sitcom, *The Big Bang Theory*. The character named Amy says to her friend Sheldon: "I don't object to the concept of a deity, but I'm baffled by the notion of one that takes attendance." To which Sheldon replies; "Then you might want to avoid east Texas." LOL

Just straight talk

I had similar thoughts, boiled down to 'Does Jesus really need all the trappings of church for us to be able to worship and fellowship with Him?', but I didn't utter them. I did become determined not to be caught up in the things man-made, for though they were at one time intended to lead people to God, they had to me become obstacles and even walls erected that prevented me from knowing Him any other way than the priest, pastor, or teacher wanted me to know Him.

But, we accept the reality of the world which we are presented. We may wonder if the building and order and hype was invented by God as a means to allow us to approach Him or not, but we sit on

those thoughts for years. We accept this is the way it is, wonder briefly in our deepest yearnings, 'What if?', and then return to the same routine, growing ever more restless over time.

Like I said, I never fit in - those are 'rebellious' thoughts

In 1978 I went to work for Jim and Tammy Bakker's PTL Club (TV ministry) in and around Charlotte, North Carolina. I was a Park Ranger at the Heritage USA site under development. Park Ranger sounds so official. But in a rapidly growing ministry that was pressured to open Heritage USA the summer of 1978, it meant I landscaped, showed little old ladies where the porta-potties were, and played host and guide.

It was the first year Barb and I were married, and it was a good experience, but once again, we didn't fit in. While the TV shows revolved around classic southern gospel singing and guests who would excite the audience, and Jesus was glorified, it was also big business.

I wondered, 'If we took away the TV cameras, the lights, the idolizing of the 'stars' that appeared on the show, could Jesus be seen in all this?' Our first year of marriage at the PTL Club was rough financially, rich spiritually, and rich as a young married couple in their 1st year together. We learned, we gleaned, we observed and made mental notes about ministry and life during that time. We learned how not to do ministry, but held to that which was good.

Rhema

Then in August of 1978, just 4 months into my work at PTL Club, the Father told me He wanted me to go to Rhema the next year. I had barely heard of Rhema, didn't know anything about it other than it was a Bible school in Tulsa, and so rose from prayer and called my mom.

She just happened to be having lunch with a friend right then, who upon hearing the news that the Father told me to go to Rhema in a year, said this: "In March the Lord told me, 'I'm going to send John to Rhema in about a year and a half, and I want you to pay his tuition.'" She was so excited I had called at the exact moment mom and her just happened to be having lunch. I was amazed at her response. She said, 'Send me a letter of acceptance and I'll write a check.' I did and she did, so in summer of 1979 we drove from North Carolina to Tulsa, not knowing what awaited us.

Rhema was a whole new world, and very exciting in 1979. I learned the integrity of God's Word - this was in the days before disciples of Kenneth Hagin twisted the Word to their own greed and lusts. It wasn't yet twisted into 'name it claim it' or 'prosperity gospel' - I learned God's Word was the final authority, and the Word and Spirit always agree. I learned to dig into the Word myself and to hear His voice as I studied and thought on the Word and ways of the Father.

But it was what I would call, 'professional' Christianity, in Tulsa, the belt buckle of the Bible belt. I was in another aquarium. I wondered what had happened to those Saturday night prayer meetings and the people who went there? I wondered where were my friends from those wonderful Thursday night teen prayer and praise meetings we went to, or the Sunday night meetings where we teens often rotated homes and experienced such moves of the Spirit?

Did we just jump from one aquarium with a certain type of fish into another aquarium with another type of fish? But with work and a new baby and school, the year went by quickly and it was soon time to move to where the Father told Barb and I when we were in college we'd be; Boulder, Colorado. That was May of 1980.

I'm jumping ahead a bit

I don't intend to take you down my Memory Lane in this series, but I do intend to get you thinking about what you truly long for, and why. You see, for centuries the Jews had worshipped in Jerusalem in a temple, and that's where God's presence was.

It really began back in Exodus 19 when the Lord came down on the mountain and gave His Word to Moses. He went from the mountain to the wilderness tabernacle He had instructed Moses to make. Some 400 years later David knew Him as the 'God who lives between the cherubs' over the Ark of the Covenant. Solomon built the first temple, and though destroyed and then rebuilt in part or completely through the years, the Temple is where God's presence was for centuries. That was their aquarium. That's all they knew.

But then came something that had never been seen before. At Pentecost God moved out of the temple and into human beings. He had confined Himself more or less to the aquarium of the Temple for centuries, but His real goal was to move out of that aquarium and into the open ocean of humanity. His goal was to move into living temples spread all over the earth, thus filling the earth with His glory, Word, and ways.

That is why something inside each Christian that rebels a bit at the aquarium and wonders 'Is there more?' We ask this because God moved out of the temple (aquarium) 2,000 years ago and into mankind. We are ocean going fish, not designed for the aquarium. And that's where I'll pick it up next week.

Blessings,
John Fenn
Remember to use cwowi@aol.com to email me

2013-11-02

I've been ruined #3

Hi all,
The Lord has graced Barb and I by timing our lives to just brush against or lightly be involved with numerous ministries just before they got off-balance or fell apart completely. To stay with my aquarium analogy, we've swum in many aquariums but moved to other aquariums just before the water started to stink.

Taking the best away

We were with and then gone from the PTL Club in Charlotte a few years before financial and moral failures caused its collapse. We were at and gone from Rhema a few years before others caused it to become name-it-claim-it and the prosperity gospel. I worked with and was gone from Global Harvest and New Life Church before various doctrinal error and moral failures occurred.

All this experience I post on our web site, and some believers when reading my ministry experience automatically label me or assume they know what I am all about, or refuse to read or listen to me because of these preconceived ideas. Sometimes I feel like asking them how they'd like me judging them based on whatever job they held in 1980, but I realize they are wounded and immature and just laying someone else's sins at my feet.

But the fact is, Barb and I were grounded in the faith in home based 'prayer meetings' when we were teenagers, and no matter what 'aquarium' of the faith we landed in next, we always longed for the open ocean experiences of swimming in the Spirit those home meetings provided. We knew we didn't fit into any 'aquarium of faith' we experienced, we just hadn't realized why - yet.

Plastic or real?

If you're a fish used to swimming in the open ocean, how do you describe those wonders to a fish who has only known an aquarium?

To a fish who has only known a plastic coral reef, how do you describe the real one? An ocean going fish has seen animals an aquarium hasn't ever seen, like an octopus for instance. How do you describe an 8 armed boneless animal that shoots black ink when scared, to a fish who has never seen one?

You would use words they were familiar with - eight, arms, black, ink - but those familiar words describe something they've never seen nor experienced, so the image in the mind formed is very different than the animal you are trying to describe.

The mind tries to wrap itself around the words but cannot for there is nothing to compare it to in their life experience.

That's what I'm saying

When we would land in yet another aquarium and talk to leaders about the 'open ocean' freedoms of the Spirit we had experienced as teenagers and that we longed for in their aquarium - they didn't understand us.

We tried to describe what we were looking for using familiar words and phrases - letting God set the agenda, worship as long as we wanted, accountability through the strengths of relationships, leadership giving away their leadership to empower people - but they looked at us like we were from another planet. We were at an impasse because we used the same words, but I was describing the ocean and they were describing their aquarium.

So about that ocean...

Everyone I talked to only knew the temple and temple terminology and had only heard scary things about the open ocean. Things like cult, and danger, and off-balance, and accountability with a huge question mark.

They spoke of people swimming in the open ocean of house church in early days because of persecution, with one sweeping statement providing themselves an excuse to ignore the fact the New Testament was written by apostles doing house church to disciples doing house church, and that Word they claim is the final authority in their lives they've understood completely out of context all their born-again life!

Square peg, round hole

And so through the years I've always felt disconnected. I was keenly aware of Christ in me, so I couldn't yell and scream to bring Him down or get His attention with that crowd. I knew the blood of Jesus was once poured out as a ransom for many and that was the only use of it spoken of in scripture, so I couldn't go with the drawing a blood line in the sand people. Jesus said to simply command demons to leave in His name, which I have done many times and had seen it work, so I couldn't relate to the crowd that went through the formulas for deliverance.

I know Christ is in me so I don't need to pray for an open heaven, so I didn't relate to that crowd. I saw in Acts they changed cities by winning people to the Lord from home based meetings, not by trying to call down demonic spirits, so I couldn't relate to that crowd.

I could read in the scripture the highest and best revelation was a person learning how to hear His voice and I was willing to pay the price to walk with Him, so I couldn't relate to the people who sought a short cut by getting a prophecy from someone - as a cure all for life's problems instead of paying the price to seek Him themselves with all their heart until they got their answer directly from Him.

I read I was not to love this world nor the things in it, so I couldn't relate to people believing God just for more things. I read how the apostles did not manipulate people for their money nor live above the people they ministered to, so I couldn't relate to those who thought God's stamp of approval is to live like royalty.

So I've been a fish from the open ocean placed in aquariums all my life. No wonder I never fit in.

Trying yet again to describe an octopus

So it was I told a Bible school leader he should not be teaching his students to yell and scream out to God at the top of their lungs each chapel service, but rather focus on Christ Who already lives in them, and teach them to hear and walk with Him - but he thought I was talking about another aquarium and therefore couldn't understand me.

I used words like 'Christ in us' and from Romans 5:1-5 that we have peace with God so we don't have to scream and yell to get His attention, and while he mentally agreed, he had no idea what walking with our Father and Lord in that way looked like. He had nothing to compare my words to in his life, because he had always been a formula-based Christian. His style brought in students which meant money which meant a bigger and more influential ministry, and it was in fashion to yell and scream to get God's attention.

Ruined

And so it is when someone asks about what house church does about 'the 5-fold ministries' I tell them the original context of 'the 5-fold' is in the home, and it works amazingly well in the home - humbly, in day to day walk through life manifestations of God's gifts. They haven't seen that aquarium, for in their aquarium the 5-fold are royalty heard only rarely in the auditorium, and are elevated almost like a rock star.

When they ask about accountability and I describe accountability in house church is through the strength of relationships, and that Jesus' teaching is our guide - if you know your brother has something against you (or you him), go to him and heal the relationship. They can't relate because in their aquarium accountability is measured by attendance, giving, and volunteerism.

They have never seen an aquarium like what I describe. Then if they dig a little more, they discover it isn't an aquarium after all; it is the open ocean they've longed for all their lives, but have been afraid to enter for fear of hurt, deception, and eternal failure or damnation.

I use the same words they know - gifts of the Spirit, leading, revelation, teaching, discussion, community, extended family of faith, being intentional in your relationships - but they have never heard those words used in that way before, so they have no idea what I'm talking about.

You can only read about house church so much, you can only hear about the open ocean so much, but your mind won't be able to wrap itself around it. You have to experience it and THEN all the puzzle pieces make sense. It isn't so much what's taught, it's what's caught.

More next week...blessings,
John Fenn
Remember to use cwowi@aol.com for email to me

2013-11-09

I've been ruined #4

Hi all,
She had asked for prayer because of an all-day headache. Several of us had gathered at a home for a meal, but after dinner and just before we all headed our separate ways, she stopped us and apologized as she asked for prayer. It was about to become the moment I realized I wasn't part of any 'aquarium' of faith.

Powerless disciples

There were 5 people who immediately circled and laid hands on her while I held back, listening for the wisdom of the Lord to see what He wanted to do and if healing was the direction to go. Some of the questions I was asking Him included was it dehydration and/or altitude, as we were in mountainous Colorado Springs, Colorado and she was from a much lower elevation. That would mean prayer wasn't required, water and sleep was. Was it from being tired or stressed, as it was a busy weekend and there were family issues back home. So I waited before Him as they immediately launched an all out spiritual assault worthy of soldiers taking Omaha Beach on D-Day.

One lady took the lead and in a 'let's cover everything' sort of prayer, beginning with pleading the blood of Jesus and drawing a 'blood line in the sand'. Then she said she was storming the gates of heaven, then commanding the devil to go to the bottom of the Grand Canyon (pity the poor campers and hikers down there), then asked the Lord to have mercy on her, then commanded angels to come and minister to her, and other commands and pleadings that sounded very spiritual, done with great passion and flourish.

Mercy me!

Then the others prayed, asking the Father to heal her, bless her family and bring them to Him, commanded the devil off her kids and husband and their business. This is what I would call a 'stew prayer' - throw everything in the pot, hope it works out, and everyone goes home with full spiritual tummies and feeling like they had kicked devil butt.

At some point someone asked how she was, and she reluctantly admitted her head still hurt. I said, let me lay hands on you, which I did saying this: "I command you to be healed in the name of Jesus. Pain leave." With amazement in her eyes she said, "It's gone! It's gone! Just like that!"

No aquarium to call home

That was the moment I realized I was not from any aquarium of the faith these people were swimming in. I was from the open ocean of believing God's Word and obeying it. That's not arrogance, it is a diagnosis. Though they loved God, their faith was in what they had been taught by popular culture and the teachers elevated by that culture, which wasn't the Word. Jesus is very clear - command healing - Jesus never prayed for the Father to heal someone (nor did the apostles), He commanded, and we are to do what He did.

I thought to myself, can you imagine Peter and John saying to the man in Acts 3, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have I give to you, in the name of Jesus, of Father please touch him, we plead the blood, get away from him devil, angels I command you to come now and minister to this man, we break the curse of the generations off this man, oh if only someone could go to the third heaven, mercy drops on him oh Lord, rise up and walk." Can you imagine that?

Make it simple

Later when asked how that man was healed, in Acts 3:16 Peter responded simply: "Through faith in the name of Jesus this man stands before you whole." Resist the urge to talk more - just speak the name and let it rest, and watch Him work. Otherwise you reveal by your many words how little you believe.

(By the way, this verse destroys the theology of cessationist's who believe healing/miracles have passed. For healing to have been only for then, so would faith in the name of Jesus have to be for 1st century only.)

But you have to know Him, and know the will of the Father for a given situation before you can have that kind of faith to speak that amazing name just 1 time and see results. Modern aquariums hit all over the target but never hit the bulls eye - teaching what inquiring minds want to know but are of little importance, they don't teach the power of the name of Jesus and knowing Him well enough to be entrusted to use it appropriately.

Side track: A brief history lesson

During a visitation with the Lord I asked Him how the body of Christ in America had gotten to the place it is, caught up in formulas and the inconsequential rather than the simplicity of the gospel, and He said this:

"I raised up what you call the Word of Faith in the 1980's to bring the integrity of My Word to those who came out of the charismatic renewal of the 1970's. But soon the enemy took advantage of lust in many hearts and perverted my Word to focus on money, thus undermining the spread of the knowledge of the integrity of my Word in my body. What you see today is the result of successive generations who never had a foundation in my Word, so they chase after distractions and another gospel and another spirit. They think they are wise and mature and on the cutting edge, but are foolish because they have given themselves to these things...But I have used these things to reveal the foolishness of their hearts that I might separate for Myself true disciples who want to move into maturity in Me..."

Feelings or Word?

When I was a teenager I remember telling the Father I felt like He didn't want my life because my dad rejected me, I didn't really like myself, and I struggled with feelings of rejection and despondency.

But I remember reading Ephesians that told me I was sealed with the Holy Spirit when I believed, that I had been blessed with all spiritual blessings, that I was seated in the heavenlies with Christ, and that I was created in Him for good things. (1:3, 11; 2:6, 10)

I remember the day clearly, standing in my bedroom with that old 'Snoopy and Charlie Brown' bedspread on my bed, that same bedspread I'd had since I was 10 but mom was too poor to buy me one more appropriate for a 17 year old, saying half to myself and half to the Father: "My feelings tell

me I'm not saved, not wanted by you, and I have no plan or purpose in life, but I believe your Word that I am sealed with the Holy Spirit, seated in the heavenlies with you Lord Jesus, and created to good works. I choose to believe you Father instead of how I feel."

So it gets down to believing God's Word or believing feelings and memories. That moment changed my life - I decided to believe the Word no matter how I felt or what I saw. From that point on I realized my feelings and emotions could be made subject to what the Word said. I admit I was so zealous and ignorant about real life that I told my mom that with faith we would never have any problems. After a rather incredulous look from her she simply said, "You just haven't lived long enough son. Wait until you have to pay the bills."

I often get email or instant messages or have conversations with people who are convinced they have committed the unpardonable sin. The unpardonable sin, that of rejecting the Holy Spirit, is at its core the act of rejecting Jesus as Lord. Jesus died for others, not Himself, so the one sin not paid for on the cross is rejecting Him. And because the Holy Spirit is the Agent of salvation, to reject Jesus is to blaspheme (reject, speak against, reject the ministry of) the Holy Spirit.

When I walk a believer through the Word showing them they haven't committed the unpardonable sin, nearly always they respond they are convinced He left them because they cannot feel Him anymore. These are people who believe in the Lord, love Him, but are convinced God is mad at them and has rejected them because they did some sin like speaking against a preacher, or in a fit of temper told the Lord if this is what it means to serve Him, they don't want Him, or other temper tantrum typical of a baby Christian. (And don't think the time a person has known the Lord means they aren't a baby. Paul indicated Christians who are unstable, chase after strange teachings, or are in strife, divisions or envy are babies in the faith.)

Aquarium free

The core truth of believing God's Word above my emotions kept me out of all the aquariums that were focused on formulas and ritual. I wasn't territorial so I didn't fit in the church system - but the Word said not to be territorial. I wasn't political nor a 'yes man', so I told the truth though I offended people sometimes, but that was what the Word said.

I got a call from my boss, a senior pastor, on the Monday after a Super Bowl Sunday, threatening to fire me because I was not in the Sunday night service, assuming I had stayed home to watch the ball game. I told him I had represented him 6 of the last 8 nights at various functions, and my handicapped son needed me and my wife needed relief. Yet he still threatened to fire me. I replied, 'Whether you do or not that is your business, but the Word says to put my family first and my wife and sons are my priority, and that's not going to change, for what I did was right.' I kept my job, but laid it on the line because I lived the Word.

If someone taught something and my spirit didn't feel right about it, I went to the Word and checked it out. If an emotion rose up contrary to the Word, I changed the emotion, worked through it, and changed my thinking that had led to the wrong emotion, correcting myself; 'That's not right, the Word says this...'

I learned if my spirit resonated with a teaching it was because the Spirit of Truth within me bore witness to my spirit about it, but if my spirit was grieved or felt wrong about a teaching it was because the Spirit of Truth within was bearing witness to the truth that the teaching was in error. So by the witness of the Spirit and the Word I learned to trust that within as a greater authority than the most famous teacher, no matter how elevated they were in people's esteem.

And that's the core reason I didn't fit in anyone's aquarium. My allegiance was to the Word and written Word, not a system, man, or formula. Then Jesus appeared to me in February of 2001 saying this:

"See what I see. People running to and fro to this meeting and that, looking for the spectacular, thinking THAT is supernatural. While they miss the supernatural work in their midst, even in their heart, for the process of discipleship IS supernatural...as it was in the beginning so it must be now; I am moving in relationships."

Finding myself without an aquarium in which to swim, I began examining how we do church today with the way Paul did church, and I learned there is little in common between the two.

If I made my thoughts and emotions submit to the Word and Spirit in daily life, was I ready to change my thoughts about what the Word said how church was to be done? How did Paul do church? That's next week, blessings,

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2013-11-16

Weekly Thoughts, Ruined #5

Hi all,

"Abnormal Christianity! All around me, everything I see, is abnormal Christianity."

I longed for the amazing experiences with the Lord people had through the 30 years covered in the book of Acts, but didn't see any of that in my 'aquarium' of the faith. To me it was clear Acts is more than history, it details 30 years of normal Christianity.

Yet all around me all I saw was the goofy or the dry as toast boring. No where did I see 'real' people, mature in character and life, balanced in their walk, knowing how to walk in the Spirit - Christians as depicted in Acts and mentioned in Paul's letters.

The arguments

The mind tries to find ways to justify why Christianity today doesn't resemble that seen in Acts:

That was only for the first century to get the story of Jesus started - But I thought; Aren't we in need of as dramatic a gospel now as then, with so many more millions upon millions of people on the earth? And if God is Judge of all, isn't He willing to provide evidence of the truth of Jesus now as He did then?

Now people have the written Word, so we don't need signs and wonders. But the Lord had to see down through time to our day, yet He still said, 'Those who believe in my name will lay hands on the sick, cast out demons....' (Note, that is not, 'Those who believe, in my name will lay hands...' but rather 'Those who believe in my name will lay hands on...' This understanding is consistent with Acts 3:16 where Peter said it was through his faith in the name of Jesus the lame man was healed)

One by one

Arguments rose in my mind, and one by one the Word had an answer. And then I read Acts 1:1, which ended all arguments, all efforts at justifying the abnormality around me, case closed, period, paragraph, over and out: *"In my earlier book Theophilus, I wrote about **all that Jesus began to do and teach.**"*

A flood of revelation raced through me. Luke had written the gospel of Luke to a Roman named Theophilus, as seen in Luke 1:1-4, "Dear Theophilus...I have therefore decided...to set the life of Jesus down for you myself in proper order..." (Note: Luke is the only author of a gospel to state he is writing in chronological order the life of Jesus, and Acts continues his chronological order of events.)

The gospel of Luke is the first part of a 2 part work walking the reader through the life of Jesus in chronological order, Acts is part 2 of that volume. Luke's gospel ends with Jesus ascending to heaven, not to be seen physically until His return (Though He has been seen by many through the centuries in the Spirit).

Yet he opens Acts saying this: **"I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach."** The gospel of Luke was just what Jesus began to do and teach, meaning Acts is the continuation of all He BEGAN.

Through the centuries the abnormal became normal, sadly

"Abnormal Christianity. All around me, everything I see, is abnormal Christianity. Acts is normal. Acts is the continuation of what Jesus began to do and teach. There is an unbroken string from the gospel ministry of Jesus, to the spiritual ministry of Jesus in Acts, to my life today - and the disciples continued all the signs and wonders Jesus began to do, and taught what He taught - Jesus is still continuing to do what He began to do and teach even to my day. I am part of an unbroken string through 2,000 years of all that Jesus began to do and teach."

That was what I said to myself when I realized Acts was the continuation of what was begun...and nothing around me resembled that continuation of what Jesus began to do and teach. Acts is normal Christianity. I longed for that! I wanted to be part of the continuation of what Jesus began to do and teach!

I couldn't do that in any aquarium because every aquarium of the faith had deviated from Acts. I had to swim in the open ocean of the Spirit just as the apostles did, to continue the ministry of the Lord as they did. I was finally willing to let my reasoning's, my emotions, my Bible education, all I thought was 'right' in my understanding of the Word, actually submit to the Word in context as it was intended.

If I was to be a part of what He began, I needed to rearrange my thinking, realizing the apostles were just walking out what Jesus began, so I needed to do what they did so I could know Him like they did, and see the signs and wonders like they did. And possibly turn my world upside down in Christ like they did.

How they did 'church'

So when the argument arose trying to explain away why they met in homes for the first 300 years after Pentecost as being due to persecution, it melted away. Meeting in homes is a continuation of all that Jesus began to do and teach.

Many if not most of His miracles and bringing people to Him were done in homes - From water into wine, to 2 blind men healed as he ate, to healing meetings at the door of Peter's mother in law's house, to dinner in the home of Simon the Leper, to calling height-challenged Zacchaeus down from the tree to have dinner in his home - the gospel story was shared in and around homes. But it is deeper than that, the first house church was Adam, Eve, and the Lord in the garden, for where 2 or more are gathered, He is in their midst, and throughout the Old Testament God makes it clear the home is the centerpiece of learning of Him.

Then I looked around the world and saw house churches popping up in every nation whether Christians were persecuted or not, so that argument fell by the way side quickly. God is moving in the relationships found in family and homes.

Written to whom?

Then I saw to whom the original letters were written, as detailed in Acts and the end of some of Paul's letters: Priscilla & Aquila in Rome and then Ephesus, Justus in Corinth, Jason in Thessalonica, Lydia in Philippi, Philemon in Colossae, and a woman name Nymphas in Laodicea - all mentioned as hosting church meetings in their homes. Our New Testament consists of letters initially sent to churches who met in these people's homes. (Acts 16:15, 40; 17:5; 18:7; 20:20; Rom 16: 3-5; I Cor 16:8, 19; Col 4:15; Philemon v1-2)

Out of context

Suddenly I had the kind of horrible revelation one only receives when they realize the key foundation their whole life was built upon was all wrong, all their assumptions wrong, and all they had believed about someone was skewed in the wrong direction. All my life I had applied the New Testament to the auditorium setting when in fact the whole of the New Testament was written by apostles doing house church, to people doing house church, and applied in their lives in home based meetings.

The place for the celebrated '5-fold' is in the home. The place for the gifts of the Spirit is in the home. The place for the Lord's Supper is in the home - all I held near and dear to my heart I had been lifting out of context and applied to an auditorium setting - completely different than intended! All efforts of mental gymnastics to justify why I did church in the auditorium, to prove why I could do church differently than the continuation of the ministry of Jesus as seen in Acts, ended. Instead of trying to justify myself, I repented.

I was totally dejected, horrified and loathing myself, completely repenting, apologizing to the Lord over and over for twisting what He had begun to do and teach into a form of my own design. Suddenly I saw it - all those aquariums of the faith were truly man-made, while the family and home was God-made; He built the garden of Eden and the first family, He did not make the auditoriums we've had the last 1,700 years.

Meeting in homes was God's design,

He made the home and ministered in homes, that's why it is a continuation of all Jesus began to do and teach! The horror of 25 years of my life teaching my Lord's words out of context hit me hard - and I also did disservice to Paul and Peter and John, James and Jude as I even asked the Lord to apologize to them - I was so horrified at myself!

I have had my own words lifted out of context and used by others in a way not intended by me, often to attack me. One of the enemy's greatest tools is lifting quotes or reading into another's words to stir up strife - even testimony against the Lord at His trial was witnesses who lifted out of context and twisted His words to be used against Him. I had done a very similar thing by teaching the Word in the auditorium context! He is SO merciful to have received me, anointed His Word as I taught, even though the application of said Word was intended to be in the close relationships seen in home-based churches.

I realize God is big enough to fill any structure man gives Him so I find no fault in others worshipping in the auditorium, but I can only speak through the grace given to me, and for me, 25 years of carefully constructed faith had to be rearranged. I would only be satisfied being part of the continuation of Jesus' ministry as He started and the apostles continued it - I had to be part of that open ocean of the faith.

Next week; picking up and reassembling the pieces. Blessings,
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2013-11-23

I've been Ruined #6

Hi all,

"We love you Americans, we really do. But you're all a bunch of liars!"

I was shocked to hear this from the wife of one of the international Bible school students, her husband nervously standing by with a roll of his eyes that said 'Oh please be quite dear let's go' in his eyes, but her tone wasn't condemning, more like frustrated. She had baited me so I bit: "What do you mean?"

Softly now, to make her point: "We admire the American way of life, your freedoms, you know - conquer the west, follow your dreams, be anything you want to be - we can't do that in my country. But you are all liars. You say 'I'll call you next week' or 'Let's get together for lunch' or 'I'll call you', but you never do!"

Looking for the right thing, but...

She was looking for genuine relationships in church and had no idea that just a little while later the Director of Music for a mega-church would sit in my office and express the same desire using different words; "I'm surrounded by people here at church, but I'm all alone. I don't have any real friends and no one really knows my wife and I. What do I do? Is there anyone real out there, without an agenda for using me or manipulating me? Are there any genuine friends in church?"

Both these couples, who became good friends of ours I might add, were searching for something the structure of the way church has been done the last 1700 years isn't designed to do: Promote relationships.

Why the IC (Institutional Church) is the way it is

Jethro watched his son-in-law Moses, settle disputes and answer questions from the people to the point of exhaustion. He told him in so many words that he needed to create the infrastructure for the Federal Government of Israel - the newest nation on the planet, born a few days earlier when they had walked across the temporarily dried up Red Sea.

"Set up captains over 1,000's, and 100's, and 50's, and 10's, and let them handle the small stuff so you only have to deal with the upper leaders and problems too big for the lower captains." (Exodus 18:17-26)

Moses did that, and the Federal Government of Israel was born. In that same time frame the priesthood for temple government would be established on the same principle, with a High Priest who presided over lesser ranks of priests, down to still lower ranked priests and eventually down to boys in training to be priests. (Samuel, for example)

The church adopts Moses' Federal Government structure

Flash forward to about 300 years after Pentecost - It is the year 313 AD, and Emperor Constantine legalizes Christianity, calling believers out of their home based meetings and into former pagan temples and their pews, establishing the system of Moses for the new auditorium style meetings of 'church'. The body stopped being the church and started going to church. By necessity one gift became elevated, the pastor/priest, and 'captains' of lesser rank were established over the people.

Thus the 5-fold, deacons (servers), helps, gifts of the Spirit, motivation gifts like exhorting and giving and organizing and all the other graces, were pulled out of the context of scripture which was the home, and made it fit into the auditorium - and it has been that way for 1700 years. That's why there are so many books on this program or that, because God designed home based meetings but man lifted it out of the home and put it in an auditorium. Man has been trying to fit that square peg in the round hole ever since.

What changed at Pentecost, and how church was for 300 years

In Exodus 19 God came out of eternity and down to the mountain to talk to Moses, then moved into the newly constructed Ark of the Covenant, residing between the cherubs to commune with Moses there. Some 400 years later David still knew Him as 'the God who lives between the cherubs'. He then moved from the tent of David into Solomon's temple with such glory the priests lost their strength as the bright cloud of His presence filled the temple. (Exodus 25:21-22, 33:1-11, II Samuel 6:2, II Chronicles 5:7-14; 7:1-3)

From that point on God lived in the Holy of Holies in the temple in Jerusalem - that's all Israel and the world knew for 1,000 years. That is 1,000 years of knowing if you wanted to meet with God, you had to go to the temple in Jerusalem, and you couldn't meet Him directly, it had to be through one of His priests, the chosen few who were in ministry to God. The rest had 'secular' jobs.

That all changed on Pentecost, for that same God who came out of eternity to meet Moses on the mountain, Who came off the mountain to live in the tabernacle's Holy of Holies, who still lived between the cherubs 400 years later in David's time, who moved with glory and fire into Solomon's temple when they brought the Ark of the Covenant and His manifest presence into that building - **on Pentecost He moved into human beings! Human beings became living temples of God!**

Paul's revelation

Paul 'got it' that we are now the temples of God and wrote continually about the realities of that fact, but nowhere is he more to the point than Colossians 1:25-27:

"...God is revealing the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is: **Christ in you!** - the hope of glory."

Christ in us! When people became living temples of God, it made the temple building irrelevant, not needed, an archaic expression of a previous time. God had revealed a mystery - He couldn't move into people who were sinners, so He had to recreate their spirit by His Spirit, then He could move inside them and they could be walking, talking, portable temples for Him, taking Him and the knowledge of Him and His ways over the face and breadth of the earth!

The consequences of Christ in you

This is a major consequence of Christ in you: You can stop doing things to impress or move Him; you can now start walking with Him.

Christ in you means no formulas are needed. He lives in you so you don't need to shout - He is not hard of hearing. You don't need to pray for an open heaven, Christ is in you. You don't need to put a specially anointed square of cloth under your pillow for 7 nights straight and then send it and your best offering to brother so and so he can pray for you.

You don't need to drop \$100 on the platform of x speaker to get God to answer your prayer or give you that breakthrough you need. You don't need to be afraid of the devil - not only is Christ in you, you've received both the authority to use His name and also the power of the Spirit as well - just command demons to flee, and they do.

It means there are no special days of the week to worship on, for Christ is in us 24/7, so every day is worship day. It means I can give freely to those in need, to leaders, to help others according to how Christ in me and my heart are directed.

It means there is no such thing as sacred and secular because Christ in me makes all I do and all I am, sacred. From my job to my home to my computer - I take Christ with me to work, to play, 24 hours a day, so all is sacred. We all have sacred jobs. We are all in ministry because Christ is in us.

The other side of the coin

It also means I am personally and instantly accountable to Him who resides in me. It means I have part of His personality in me, and every other brother and sister in the Lord have part of His personality in them, therefore being in relationship with other living temples becomes my #1 priority in how I worship. I am so eager to see what He is doing in others, to see Him in them, I love to be around them in real life, through the ups and downs, the defeats and victories.

It means we are all equal, the apostle and giver of a cup of water to a child, for we are all saved by the same blood - the only difference is our function in life and the body of Christ. Christ in me means I am free to be myself as I continually grow in Him, taking every challenge in life and relationship to ask, 'How can I grow more in Him through this?'

It means - I can swim in the open ocean, no more tied down to an aquarium, but schooled together with other 'fish' of the same kind, for Paul said there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, we are all one in Christ.

Righteousness comes through faith in Christ, but it is unproven - anyone can say they are a Christian. God has designed that the proof of our righteousness be manifest in relationships, and those start in the home just like it did with Adam, Eve, and the Lord in the garden - where 2 or more are gathered, He is in their midst - why? Because He lives in them both!

And that raises the question for next week in a new series...until then!

Blessings,

John Fenn

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