

TAKE ME HOME, WINDRIDER

“One Cowboy’s Perspective”

When I was a child I thought as a child and wanted to be another Lenny Moore, #24 with the Baltimore Colts! Then I decided I wanted to be my band-director dad and play my beloved tuba for the rest of my life.

Then I grew up a bit more and wanted to be a cowboy, or an Indian – it didn’t matter which. I just wanted to live in the great outdoors and go everywhere on the back of a mighty and trustworthy horse.

As time has flown by, I’ve lived in and through years of labor in such diverse ways as farming and ranching, teaching, print and radio media work, carpentry, and finally ministry – the place I’ve worked longest and been blessed most abundantly.

And while ministry fulfills my calling and purpose in life, never have I forgotten those early dreams and experiences. In fact, each has informed my growth and maturation in ministry. In addition, I am thankful for skills I still use, and for invitations I’ve received to participate in using some of those cowboy and writing skills through these years as a Pastor.

For these gifts I am deeply appreciative, especially as they find themselves woven into my preaching and teaching, and for how those cowboy dreams and ranching experiences have made TAKE ME HOME, WINDRIDER both possible and a reality.

"A Traveler's Tale"

Jeremiah 1:5; Exodus 9:16

"I knew you before your mama knew you were on the way!"

The new day was a welcome relief. A cool morning breeze was clean and invigorating, totally opposite the unusual heat of yesterday. As I headed for the barn to saddle Deuce I was looking forward to riding pasture in these early conditions, even knowing that they could well give way to another afternoon of dusty depression.

I was off to the northwest pasture to check mama cows and their new babies while Tom, foreman on the LZ ranch, was headed to the southeast; both of us were looking for any signs of sickness, or even maybe the birth of a new calf. It was about a three-mile ride out, the needed time riding the pasture, and then the ride back.

Sights and sounds and smells along the way captured my imagination. The breeze through the tops of creek-bottom cottonwoods and the trickle of clear water over multi-colored stones, the songs of birds and crickets, the greening of late

Spring, and the smell of leather over horse flesh were together a lush symphony to the senses, a blessing of Mother Nature's own design.

My work was completed with only one stop to doctor the beginnings of pinkeye in a very young calf, so the journey back to the house would get me there just in time for another of Mary Francis' amazing lunches.

Tom's mom, we call her MF, was a tiny lady who wielded wide influence among the family and crew, in part because of her poetic view of creation and faith, work and leisure. She was a delight with whom I shared many an evening hour in conversation regarding ultimate matters such as life, death, purpose, and passion. And she was an incredible cook to boot.

About a mile from the barn I was daydreaming, thankful for the rodeo-free morning and the comfortable weather. As I rode up over a rise that would bring the home place into view I happened to glance down at the ground. I don't know why, but when I looked there I was startled to see a beautiful wild flower, Indian blanket we call it, decked out in bright orange, red and yellow in its daisy formation. I had seen thousands, no millions of these small beauties on this ranch, but this one struck me in a unique way.

I pulled Deuce to a stop and stepped down. Kneeling beside that new-found treasure, I realized for the first time that many wild flowers such as this one had been born, blossomed, and died without ever being seen by human eyes. What made this one so special was that I noticed it, causing me to wonder if it was there just for me!

Of course it was there with or without my surprise, but in that moment it was mine, and I was thankful. It was a gift

that reminded me of God's glorious grace everywhere. Instead of plucking it for a hatband ornament, I left it in honor of that grace.

That was a transformational moment for me, an experience that I believe nurtures my faith travels even today. For that gift became a vital ingredient in my journey's blossoming into a question that now captivates my imagination.

I have come to wonder: are we indeed known by God before we are created in our mother's womb, and stamped by God with a divine purpose for this journey? Are we truly created only a little less than the angels; and as we travel this life as sojourners in a foreign land, could it be possible that we are invited to participate in a gift the angels don't receive? Could it be possible that our returning to the home we call Heaven is angel-anticipated, and that upon our arrival we will be welcomed to a forum where we might describe to the angels what this human experience has been like for us?

Could it be that in our human separation from home we come to know something about grace and glory that angels can't know?

Is it possible that we're invited to participate in this journey into a strange and faraway place so that in our return home we can share with the angels what it's like to find and glorify God in the surprise of simple wildflowers along the way that assure us God is yet present and worthy of our praise, no matter where we are? Could it possibly be true?

The more I experiment with the thought and apply it to my daily life, the more it makes sense to me. And how exciting it is to consider divine ramifications and shared angel-joy as my unique story – or indeed each of our stories – is told.

Even beyond that, it thrills me to believe that my

response of praise, of offering the glory due to God, could be created in any form I choose! I dream now about the possibility of being given a Heaven-gift of musical skill beyond my present limitations so I might compose a symphony of praise scored for a full band and orchestra and chorus of heavenly musicians, maybe angel talents!

With Handel having already produced his "Messiah," I wouldn't need to rework that masterpiece. I could produce a gift specific to my journey's discoveries, one that will speak to the glory of God in the many and different ways I have found God present to me in good times and not so good, in health or sickness, in pain or pleasure all along the way home.

To top that off, if I choose to do so, I might simultaneously conduct the complete work myself while astride a perfectly gentle horse and playing along on the tuba!

Surely this sojourn is an adventure planned in Heaven, and for those who accept the blessings, an opportunity to thrill even the angels upon our return with reports of God's glory discovered everywhere, even in lone wildflowers far, far from home.

"A Traveler's Tale"

JEREMIAH 1:5

It looks simple enough: Jeremiah has received a call and commission from God, and the Lord's assurance to him is that *"You have come from me, you began as an idea in my heart, 'before you saw the light of day, I had holy plans for you' (Mssg), you are to be a prophet to all my children who also came from the same place as yourself!"*

In other words, Jeremiah has, and we all have, come into being out of the creative genius and unlimited love of God.

And while we are not all prophets, I believe it's safe to believe we all are called and commissioned by God for a specific purpose.

EXODUS 9:16

In the midst of his instruction to Moses, the Lord notes that Moses has been allowed to live for one purpose: that God's almighty power might be seen, and God's very name sounded throughout all creation, "*that my reputation spreads in all the earth*" (Mssg).

In other words, Moses was, and we are, called to offer evidence of God's glory in the lives we live: in our thoughts, words, and deeds. And in order that we do that, we must look for it, search our minds, hearts, and spirits in the midst of this earthly experience to find and reveal evidences of God's unlimited power, love, grace, and mercy!

REFLECTIONS

So, if we've come from somewhere (Heaven), and we are given a divine mission or plan to fulfill, it seems appropriate to believe that when we get back home a part of our mission might be to compile a glory/grace/power/love report to share with the angels, those divine among our brothers and sisters who are not given the gift of the human journey into this wilderness, to report to them and all of Heaven how amazing is God's power and grace even when separated from home!

Do you believe you came from the creative hand of God?

Do you believe God has a plan, a commission for you to fulfill here on earth?

How often do you find God's amazing grace there to

bless you, whether you are celebrating the joys of life or groaning under the weight of life's challenges?

How often do you report to your circle of influence these evidences of God's intimate presence to you, in both the good times and the challenging times?

If you were to begin writing down evidence of God's presence and grace in your life, how long do you think it might take you to have a gigantic journal of celebrated comfort and peace and joy collected?

“Marshmallow”

Deuteronomy 4:29-31

“No matter what, seek God, and you will not be abandoned.”

I don't have anything against smaller animals like cats and dogs. Critters like skunks and raccoons and armadillos and snakes you can have. But dogs and cats are mostly okay, even though I'd rather not own one personally.

My preference is working with larger animals, specifically the horses and cattle on a ranch. I know no domesticated, trained, or herd animal is perfect. But I also know how much dynamite can be packaged in a dog no bigger than a large cantaloupe.

Take Drover for example. He was a small white mutt, the sidekick to a larger golden mutt named Sadie, and by far the lesser in courage on the LZ ranch, at least in my view. Drover was mostly a follower and shied out of the way of cattle long before they could have been any danger to him. I guess that's part of the reason I took to calling him Marshmallow: all white, a bit fluffy, and pretty much full of hot air as good cow dogs go.

But he sure stirred up a pasture-load of trouble the day Tom and I tried to bring in cattle in “the home place” for feeding. It was mid-Spring, and we weren’t sure we could do it, but we decided to try and call the pasture of newly bought steers in with the pickup horn they’d been called with to their feed all Winter.

We were pleasantly surprised when it seemed to be working. The steers, all 80 of them, were a bit timid because we wanted to call them into the front lot, which would save us the trouble of rounding them up later. They were headed that way. The pickup was into the lot, and about half the herd was through the gate.

Suddenly there came a sickly “yip” from under the bottom board of an adjoining corral. It was Drover, Marshmallow, trying to act tough from behind protective cover. All cowboy hell broke loose!

Before we could do anything halfway constructive, the steers spooked and split down the middle. Half of the now crazy critters blew north, took out two fences around the hay lot, and didn’t stop running for a full mile. The other half seemed to scamper backward for fifty yards before turning and disappearing to the far back side of the home pasture.

Then it was all over but the screaming. Tom was so mad his red face could have lit up a midnight moonless sky like a bonfire, and Marshmallow disappeared down the creek, not to be seen for close to three days. For a stupid move and sad little yip, being gone for that long was pretty smart. Drover allowed time for things to cool down a bit before he, tail between the legs, came whimpering back to the house looking for some sympathy and supper.

That afternoon was spent hunting down and gathering

42 steers in the home pasture. The next day we started the search for the other 38 head. All told, we repaired three fences, doctored four calf-hide barbed wire wounds, and lost a whole day out of the week's work plan.

But that was it. Everything was fixable and forgivable, and the groaning gave way to laughter. The day was not destroyed! Lost hours were adjusted into next week, and life rolled back into routine until the next ranch rodeo.

Life's crazy like that, though. When everything seems smooth as silk, such peaceable reverie can be blown to bits with sudden impact. The news of someone you love graduating from this journey across the stage to our Heavenly home, a fall that breaks an arm, a dead battery in the pickup when you're already late, all these and many other surprises can catch you off guard.

And yet, perhaps in those moments especially, our Father God is intimately present to us, ready to offer relief and reassurance, grace and gentleness, as well as the steady reminder that we're never alone.

In moments like that, when we may feel abandoned or helpless or confused or angry, we are offered the blessed assurance that this is not all there is to it, and the sweet invitation to consider how a blasted but now humorous experience with a Marshmallow mutt might become a cherished story about the glory of God in the midst of surprise!

“Marshmallow”

DEUTERONOMY 4:29-31

One of the most cherished promises of the Lord is found here. It's a promise, an assurance, that no matter how deep the mud might be we're stuck in, no matter how hot the heat

that tries to roast us, no matter how forsaken we may at times feel, if, IF we choose to seek the face of our Lord with all our heart, with everything in us that can conceive of and pursue him, *we will find him!*

Not only that, we can cling to that divine promise because this, our Creator God, is merciful, is in total unabashed love with us, and he *will not* abandon us, leave us to our own resources, let us fall farther than he can reach out to catch us . . . IF we seek him with all our heart!

REFLECTION

When was the last time you had done everything you thought you had been asked to do, everything you needed to do to complete your task/work with integrity and satisfaction, only to have it all blown away at the last moment by a hurtful word from a co-worker or boss, or an accident that completely discombobulated your efforts? And, how did you handle it?

What is the standard of success that guides your efforts in faith and trust? Is that the same standard that guides you in your family and/or job?

Have you ever been guilty of a negative attitude, or body language that speaks volumes about your displeasure and after making that offering found that it was totally uncalled for, unnecessary, and/or deeply disappointing to a spouse, child, co-worker or friend?

When was the last time part or all of the above transpired, and how long did it take for you to remember that IF you seek the Lord, his divine mercy will bless you with a capacity for forgiveness, for gentleness, with eyes capable of seeing his grace in the midst of it all?

It's not easy to compile a grace report in the midst of

turmoil or upheaval, but could those times be perhaps the richest opportunities for mining such grace?

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