

5/4/06

Dear friends,

My heart is full – largely because God is a Weaver. If you don't have time to read (another) long letter, thank God for His weaving work in your life and others. If you do have time for the rest of the story, here it is:

Last month I wrote to tell you the Rocky Mountain Presbytery (RMP) would be held at Grace Presbyterian Church, 4/27,28. The last time presbytery was held at Grace was 2002. However, I was very grateful that presbytery would be held at the place where, during Vacation Bible School, June, 1958, I first heard the gospel and professed faith in Christ. Last Thursday afternoon, RMP transferred my credentials from Eastern Carolina Presbytery (pending dismissal from ECP). Friday morning they approved my call to plant a church in Helena. So, in the place where I first heard the gospel, I was called to be an evangelist. Marvel. God is a Weaver.

But, there is even more to the story. Thursday night, at the worship service, I sat with my Mom, my brother, Gary, and Steve Leonard. Steve is the son of Bill Leonard, my pastor from 1958-1973. Steve is five years older than I am. When I was a kid, Steve was one of my heroes. For example, he was the half back on the high school football team when I was in junior high. I remember cheering him on. Steve later married one of Dr. Rayburn's daughters (Dr. Rayburn was president of Covenant Seminary when I graduated). Sadly, she died of cancer. Later, Steve remarried and now lives part of the year in Georgia. I was surprised and pleased to see that Steve was at the presbytery meeting.

At the Thursday night worship service, I leaned over to tell Steve something I had never told him before. In August, 1970, Steve had returned to Ft. Carson (Colorado Springs) after a tour of duty in Viet Nam. One Sunday night from the pulpit at Grace, he spoke about the impact Viet Nam had on him. In the midst of the carnage he had witnessed, he had a renewed sense of wanting his life to count. He knew that God's Word is eternal. He knew that people are eternal. He knew that in the ministry, he could invest in both. That was part of his call to the ministry. I remember those words from Steve penetrating deep in my heart.

Years earlier (about 1961), an evangelist (I don't recall his name – but my Mom thinks it was Bob Reuman, a missionary to Formosa) came to speak in that same sanctuary one Sunday evening. That evening my Mom and I were sitting in the first pew - right under the pulpit! This evangelist was greatly concerned that young men were not pursuing the ministry. At the conclusion of his appeal, he prayed and asked that, while everyone's eyes remained closed, those who felt called to the ministry would stand. I felt impelled to stand. I did. My Mom remembers wondering at that event – she said: "*You seemed so young.*"

Of course, as the years passed by, when I recalled that event, I would think: "*That was only the response of an immature kid. God wouldn't pay attention to a kid.*" But, now, 28 years after my ordination, it is clear that God did pay attention to that boy.

Scripture tells us about God calling another boy, David: *He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them* (Ps. 78:70-72). In His grace, God took the initiative to call David. Where was David? Matthew Henry comments: "*David was taken not from leading the rams, but from following the ewes, especially those great with young. This intimated that of all the good properties of a shepherd, he was most remarkable for his tenderness and compassion to those of his flock that most needed his care*" (p. 540, Vol.3). Of course, David was capable of leading the rams – men – even mighty men. But, he could also care for those with young. When the psalmist writes: *He brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel His inheritance*

we also see the wonder of God's grace in calling a people for Himself. Once they were not a people – now they are His people. Once they were his enemies – now they are His beloved ones. God has a greater inheritance than just Israel. Ps. 82:8 *All the nations are your inheritance.* So we take the good news of Jesus to all nations – even Helena, MT. And, for 40 years God gave David sustaining and enabling grace – despite obvious sin – to shepherd and lead these people. *And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them*

Pray for integrity of heart for me too - Stephen *David* Bostrom. As I begin this new calling, there are so many needs that call for prayer. But, integrity of heart is central. The word the Psalmist uses here can be translated: "wholeness, completeness, entirely in accord with truth and fact, wholly God's, wholehearted in commitment to the Person and requirements of God – well rounded, balanced, mature – not based on mere appearances." Who can meet such requirements? We know. The *spotless* Lamb of God – the only One whose heart has been fully integrated. I believe He is the One who gladly gave His integrity before God to me in the gospel. Our hearts are full because of this gospel. This gospel literally "pre-occupies" us.

But, the providence of God can fill our hearts too. As you have read of God's weaving His calls to me together with the sanctuary at Grace, is your heart filled too? Mine is. In the place where I first heard the gospel 48 years ago, the very sanctuary where I first responded to a call to the ministry, where that call came again through Steve Leonard, where I was nurtured in the faith - in that same place - with Steve Leonard and many other fathers and brothers in the faith voting - I was called as an evangelist to plant a church in Helena, MT. Did some one say "Glory!?"

Other "heart-fillers" -

1. Today is the **National Day of Prayer**. Lift up our nation – and its cities – even Helena.
2. When RMP voted to transfer my credentials, **Jason Barrie**, Assoc. Pastor at Rocky Mountain Community Church in Billings, came forward to pray for me. I call him - "*the man from Macedonia*" because he was the first to ask me to use my 2005 sabbatical to investigate church planting in MT.
3. We asked you to pray for the development of our **prayer/update team**. With the addition of men in Rocky Mountain Presbytery and men for the Village 7 Presbyterian who signed up at Horn Creek Ranch, now @ 330 will be receiving this e-mail. Thank you again for praying. Thank you for your encouragement. **If you know of someone who might like to be on this mailing list, please ask them if they would like to receive these updates. Connect us with those who may want to hear this unfolding.**
4. On 4/27, when I met with the Mission to North America Committee of RMP, I got some very good news. Earlier, I had *misunderstood* that the anticipated money from people in Helena who we trust will partner with us in the church plant was not to be factored in to the money that counts toward the total that needs to be pledged before we move to Helena. However, since that anticipated income over the next 5.5 years can be counted, we now have @ \$300,000 less to raise! **Pray that God will be preparing people in Helena - and others (you?) to support this church plant.**
5. We asked you to pray for **Peace**. Thank God for the generosity they have shown since the inception of the sabbatical. They will pay my regular salary and benefits from July 1 – Dec. 1. Then that amount will be cut in half from Jan-June. Last month, Session did give me permission to contact individuals at Peace for fund raising. I will be writing some materials – asking for people to consider supporting us above their regular giving to Peace - getting the approval of the deacons, and sending those appeals out. Please pray.
6. Thank you for praying for the **sale at our home on 4/21, 22**. Many people came – and bought! What did not sell, we will take to a church wide yard sale the deacons have approved for the Helena Project.
7. May 29 will be our **30th anniversary**. Thank God with us.

Pray for Helena. At RMP I met Joshua Charette, a young man from the Lakota people with seven years of pastoral experience. Josh will be starting Covenant Seminary this fall. Thank God for Josh and the work God has done in his life and his wife's life. Pray for them as they get started at Covenant. Josh was excited to hear about the anticipated church in Helena. His wife's parents live there – and although they profess faith in Christ – at present, they are not affiliated with any church. There are other Helenans who also profess faith but are not participating in the life of a church. Pray that God would prepare them and us to partner together in the gospel in Helena.

Thank you, very much, for partnering with us in the gospel of Jesus.



Steve and Via/Ginny