



The Sleeping Giant - north of Helena

November 13, 2007

Dear Friends,

Jesus is not a personal Savior who only seeks to meet my needs. He is the risen crucified Lord of all creation who seeks to guide me (I would add: "and us and our communities") back into the truth of the Triune God (D. Stephen Long). How does Jesus guide us back to the truth of the Triune God? One way is that Jesus summarized the 613 laws of the Torah into two primary commands – Love God and love your neighbor.

At first, that is good news – two are so much simpler than 613. But, then we discover how challenging it is for people like us to love – whether God or our neighbor. Take our neighbors.

Think with me about a few words we use in our American culture.

- Today, much of America is *homeless*. Not that we are without shelter; most of us have houses or apartments. But, where is our home? Most of us abandon our shelter during the day. We go to work and return to use our houses - sometimes as a place to eat - sometimes as a place to sleep - sometimes as a place where we are entertained.
- We call a gathering of such houses/apartments a *bedroom community*. Is the primary function of our shelter to give us a place to sleep? If so, then why do we attach the word community to it? Many bedroom communities don't have much community.
- Of course, bedroom communities are part of *subdivisions* - a word that reminds us of integers and mathematics - not people. And such subdivisions are often disconnected – built with cul-de-sacs - not through streets with local meeting places like bakeries and bars.
- Subdivisions are further disconnected by architecture. Few homes have *front porches*. Such places become like movie sets - little life is evident.
- Disconnected subdivisions depend upon another impersonal but necessary component - *THE CAR* – where we motor about - again often removed from engaging our neighbors.

How can we love one another with the obstacles intrinsic to such a place?

Whatever happened to the term: "*neighborhood*?" Have we lost our neighbors? Have these endlessly fascinating beings made in the image of God been replaced by entertainment - computer habits, TV and music - behind four walls? You've heard that good real estate investment depends upon: Location, Location, Location. Recently, a couple who bought a home in another part of Helena, told me that "Location" was the basis of their decision to buy a certain home. However, they now believe they should have used another priority in buying a home. They have found that actually what is most important is: Neighbors, Neighbors, Neighbors.

Jesus, who reiterated God's command to love our neighbor, shows us how far He is willing to go to get past our cultural obstacles and our personal inability. A friend recently wrote: *Our God could have been a deity who kept his universe tidy and his creatures happy. That deity would be somewhat impressive. A deity who could have "fixed" what was broken is even more impressive. But **God** - who had all creation*

ruined and sabotaged by Satan and our first parents – God who came down to earth in manure and straw and afterbirth - God tempted in every way we are tempted, spat upon and tortured to death to pay for the sins of His killers, to forgive them, to adopt them, and to want them to co-reign with Him - to love them forever is something, SomeONE else - Someone worthy of eternal worship.

It is this God who chooses our neighbors for us. It is this God who gives us His love for our neighbors. Alienated, dysfunctional cultures watch out. It is this God we long to have our neighbors worship with us.

Recently, one of my sons asked me: “Dad, if I became a millionaire, what would you like me to do for you?” I replied: “I’d like you to build a big front porch for our home.” The porch on our former home in NC was over 50 feet long. What an investment in materials and labor – not only to build but to maintain. That home was built in 1913. How times have changed. Few make such an investment today.

Our home in Helena was built in 1907. A 1930 map with footprints of houses in our neighborhood shows that our home had a long front porch. Now, we have a tiny (4x6) front “stoop.” Although we don’t have a big porch, I have the next best thing - a big window in front of my desk – a window that faces the sidewalk. Let me introduce you to a few people who walk by.

If you pray, pray for our neighbors

One is **Dan**. Dan walks by on his way to the corner grocery store a couple of blocks away. Holly, a young mother in the neighborhood, told me that Dan is suffering from a rare form of blood cancer. When I asked Dan about his condition, he told me that only 100 other people in the world have such a condition, a form of Mycosis Fungoides. He remarked that he would have had better odds to win a jackpot. The cancer has greatly aged Dan, a former TV traffic newsman in Las Vegas. I was surprised to learn that he is only 52. After we talked one day, I asked him if I could pray for him. He was pleased. Although I had no clue Dan had any relationship with Jesus, we talked about what a difference Jesus makes for us. Recently, Dan was hospitalized for a couple of weeks with an infection. The neighborhood has rallied with food, visits and rides. I asked Dan if I could have you pray for him. He asks for your prayers. If you pray, please pray for Dan.

Another is **Jesse**. Jesse is a college grad who played on the line in college football. He is a big man. Jesse walks by our house on his way to work; he’s the bouncer at Jesters – one of the roughest bars in town. One night, he told me he was fascinated by books and by the origin of words. I invited him in. I gave him a copy of Verbivore’s Feast by Chrysti (the word) Smith. It happened to be next to my Hebrew bible. He told me he had a girl friend who taught him some Hebrew. I gave him a copy of Wendell Berry’s Fidelity: Five Short Stories. If you pray, pray that God will develop our relationship even more.

Mike, a Native American, lives a few doors down the street. One day, as he passed by, I called out: “How are you?” I barely heard his reply: “Not well.” I asked him what was wrong. He told me that the night before his 16 year old step-daughter, Sarah Lynn, had been riding with some friends. They had driven over a cliff. The friends had seat belts on. They lived. Sarah Lynn didn’t. We talked. – about grief – about this broken world – about God. I asked him if I could pray for him. I did. Will you too?

Sometimes, people get to pick their neighbors. We were delighted when some new friends, **Luke and Amanda** – who had moved in down the street – surprised us and bought the home behind ours. We put in a gate and put up some steps for easy access. Here is a picture of Noah and Isaac with Luke and Amanda’s one year old daughter, **Marybelle**.



I wonder: who is walking by your door? Who can you invite in? For Christ's sake, even if we're not very good at it, let's love our neighbors. Who knows, God may help us!

If you pray, please pray for The Helena Project

Please pray for the gatherings we have. Like our Sunday evening cook outs last summer, many mostly focus on our neighbors:

- On 11/10/07 we had a 100th **Birthday Party** for our home. About 35 came – including some people we had not met before.
- The last Friday of each month (Nov – April), we will put up a banner with a bowl of soup and anyone who wants soup will be welcome - “**Soup's On.**”
- When we came to Helena we realized we were meeting young couples with young children. Some had asked us to lead a discussion on parenting. Now, every other Wednesday evening, Via and I meet in our home with **5 couples** to discuss “**Shepherding a Child's Heart.**” On alternate Wednesdays, we've offered to watch their children. Once again, if you pray we would appreciate your prayers for that gathering. Especially pray for God's blessing on these young couples as they father and mother their children.
- We bought a couple of fondue pots. We think **fondue dinners** will be conducive to having the kind of conversations we want to have.
- Pray for God's guidance in regard to other kinds of gatherings we need to have.

I would also appreciate you praying that God would prosper a new relationship with an **accountant**. We are transferring that work from a friend in NC to an accountant in Helena.

If you pray, please pray for Helena

Many times our neighbors are people who attend the same meetings we do. Pray for the leaders in our community who meet each Thursday morning at 7:00 for Hometown Helena. One, **Marshall**, told me he is losing sight in one eye. He asked for prayer too.

In the past, I have asked you to pray for **Roger Brooks** and his Destination Development Team as they have been getting feedback regarding what makes Helena unique. Finally, Roger has proposed that Helena become known as “**The West's Learning Center for the Arts.**” Roger commented: “*What*

struck us was the breadth of the art and artisan activity in Helena, and the intellectual bent of the residents. If there ever was a town with a foundation, you've got it. People could come here to learn ceramics, or sculpting, or even acting or fly-tying. A brand needs to be something people can do and experience and not just something to look at, Brooks said, so local arts groups would need to beef up their educational offerings. Chautauqua, NY, is one of the few places in this country that have developed that niche. If you'd like to read my letter to Roger and his assistant, Vicky, it is attached.

Would you pray for this process? As you can imagine, it faces significant challenges. Pray that this new focus would enable people to work together for the good of this community. Francis Schaeffer once commented: "*Art is a reflection of God's creativity, an evidence that we are made in the image of God.*" We are excited to live in a creative community – one that points to the image of God.

Helena continues to grow. One glaring need is more competition for air travel. Presently, people find it more affordable to travel to Missoula, Bozeman or Great Falls to travel by air. Recently, some leaders in town secured a \$50,000 grant to encourage United Airlines to bring service here. Soon, they will begin raising matching funds. The Airport Authority is arranging another visit to **United Airlines** in Chicago in early December to work through a number of issues related to the **pending start-up of air service to Denver**. Please pray.

If you pray, please pray for Rocky Mountain Presbytery (RMP)

Pray for PCA church planters and churches in Montana, Wyoming and Colorado. In Montana there are two established churches and two church planting efforts. This next year, we anticipate another established church, Faith Covenant (now an Orthodox Presbyterian Church) to join the PCA. Will we have our **own presbytery in Montana** someday? Please pray.

And pray for the men who are pursuing training for the ministry. Please continue to pray for my intern from last summer, **Josh Charrette**, his (pregnant) **wife Katie**, and their two sons: **Alex and Aiden**. Josh is in the midst of his second year at Covenant Seminary.

I have been elected to be Moderator of Rocky Mountain Presbytery for 2008. I will need your prayers.

If you pray, please pray for our family

Please pray for **Jared, Rebekah, Jackson and Savannah** in Atlanta. While Via was there last summer, Jackson and Savannah were baptized at Ivey Creek Presbyterian Church. Jared has gone back to work for Century 21 Real Estate. Pray for God's provision.



Jordan and Claire have moved to Raleigh, NC. Claire is working as nurse at Wake Med, and Jordan has been painting. He also wants to edit hours and hours of film he took at the Crow Powwow in SE Montana last summer. He hopes to make a documentary. They need to replace the transmission on one of their cars. Pray that they will have sufficient income to do that.

Rachel and Nathan have moved to Chapel Hill. Rachel continues her Art History degree at UNC, Chapel Hill and Nathan is overseeing the construction of 9 high end homes.

Zach and Micah are working here in Helena now. They are painting the new country club. They both plan to travel to NC to see friends over the holidays. Pray for the decisions they are making regarding school and life.

Noah, Jesse and Isaac are doing well in school. Thanks for your prayers for their adjustment.

Pray that **Via and I** will love each other – our children – our neighbors and Helena – for Christ's sake. Via has started substitute teaching. I plan to be in NC for a wedding in mid-December and hope to see many of our friends there - and arrange for a meeting with Lady Savannah and her family.

Blessings,

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Attachment: Steve's response to the branding idea

If you no longer wish to receive these updates, please send me an email with "please remove address" on the subject line. Thanks.

