

Dr. Wm. Richard Kremer

July 29, 2007

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“2:22 AM”

Romans 8: 1-4;6

As my children can attest, ours is a family of traditions, and there is one stretching back more than twenty years now that constitutes one of my favorite days of the year.

In its present form, this tradition takes place on a certain Thursday in June,

When I pick my boys up from their last final exam, along with my “third son,” Lee Branscome, and we take off for Cashiers, N.C., and a round of golf at High Hampton resort.

We stop at the KFC in Sylva for our traditional first meal of summer, then walk eighteen holes in one of the most beautiful, relaxing settings in the world.

Then we drive over the mountain, through Highlands, down to Franklin, where we enjoy a meal at an amazingly good little Italian restaurant named Lucio’s.

Then we spend the night at a nearby Comfort Inn, where the boys can enjoy the indoor pool and hot tub, and watch the opening game of the NBA playoffs. The next morning we go set up camp for friends from all over the country who come in for a great weekend of river rafting.

This year, we followed this time-honored tradition to the letter,

and at the end of this wonderful day, Stewart and Lee were snoring in one bed, as my son Mark and I shared the other, when suddenly in the dead of night, Mark bolted up and said something indistinct.

I responded, “What?” He mumbled again whatever he said the first time. I said, “Speak clearly!”

He looked at me in anguish and exclaimed, “I’ve overslept for an exam!”

Then he moaned, “Oh, no!” and started rising out of bed in terror.

I lay a restraining hand on him. “Mark,” I said, “school’s out. It’s over. You’re free.”

He gave me this look of absolute wonder, then a great smile spread across his face -- and he fell back upon the bed in a dead sleep. I looked at the clock: it was 2:22 AM.

Of course, *he* could sleep, but now *my* mind was afire, wide-awake.

For the message I delivered unto Mark is the essence of the Gospel message,

yet the fear that troubled his unconscious and stabbed him wide-awake in anxiety is the very fear that most of us carry around within much of the time.

We are beset by the unsettling sensation that we have fallen short of the demands life makes upon us.

We live in the fear that we are failing life, indeed, that we have failed.

So, though we have spent a summer contemplating the virtues to which we must aspire in order to strengthen our character and enrich our faith, we need to hear a fundamental Gospel message in the depth of our being that frees our souls from tension.

We have spent the summer keeping before our eyes the call to prudence, justice, idealism, temperance, fortitude, faith, hope and love.

We know that these virtues are meant to stretch our being, to expand our vision, to enlarge our witness and enlighten us.

Yet these virtues of light also cast a dark shadow, the shadow of falling short.

We hear the summons to strive for the high calling of Christ,

but we are beset by the gnawing fear that we have all missed the mark, fallen short of the glory of God.

We need to hear this great truth: “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” None!

We go through our lives fixated on trying to pass exams of righteousness on which we have already received a passing grade. We need to realize, our righteousness has already been established in Christ. The grades are in: we've received an A! We gained our righteousness through the ministry of our Lord Jesus. He has taken the test for us. School is out and we are free, free from the burden of having to prove ourselves against any high bar of goodness.

We don't need to be virtuous to earn God's acceptance. Through Christ, we are already accepted. We don't have to do anything to gain admission into God's favor.

School is out, and we are free; God's admission office has already ruled in our favor.

We are accepted! We are included! School is out! We are free!

God has already admitted us into communion with the divine.

The righteousness of Christ has set us free.

We are free to live lives of virtue that can unleash God's power into our lives and through us out into the world.

There is a second element of our June family tradition that is pertinent to our spiritual freedom.

Before I leave on this trip, Steve Taylor and I load about a ton of wood in the church van, so I can haul it down to the woods and stash it there for the church's future use throughout the summer.

For a time, the van is so heavy I feel like I'm driving a dump truck, but only for a little while.

The first thing we do when we arrive at camp is unload that wood,

and as each log and stump is removed, one can almost hear the van sighing, "Ahhhh!" in relief.

Yet I wonder, how many of us live our lives carrying around the weighty lumber of guilt, worries, and memories of past failure?

Do we not know that we are free? Do we not know that we are forgiven?

Do we not know that we have been given license to live lighter lives

if only we will surrender our burdens unto our heavenly Father

and experience God's liberating lightness of grace?

We have been freed by the righteousness of Christ. We are fully accepted by God.

Yet we carry around fears that disturb our sleep.

Through Christ we have communion with God.

We don't need to do anything to earn this communion.

God has already done what is needful to accept us into the divine fellowship.

If only the liberating power of God's acceptance of us can pierce us to the very depth of our being,

then we will sleep more soundly,

and rise to live lives of joy and wonder.

For there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!

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July 29, 2007, Communion Sunday

Seventh in the Series