

**Dr. Wm. Richard Kremer**

**June 1, 2008**

**[www.stjohnsbaptistchurch.org](http://www.stjohnsbaptistchurch.org)**

**Be a Blessing!**

**Genesis 12: 1-2**

In the deadly cold that gripped Bastogne, Belgium in early January of 1945, a young private roused an equally young sergeant from his brief rest in the dark of a bitter night. He explained that there was an officer who wanted to cross their lines, but didn't know the password. The young sergeant, though he had had virtually no sleep, offered to deal with the issue. He confronted this visibly perturbed officer, who obviously regarded himself as someone of great importance. "What's the problem?" the sergeant asked. "I need to cross your lines," the officer replied. "Now." "Not without a password, you don't," replied the young sergeant. "What's your name, son?" the officer demanded. "Sergeant Dick Williams, sir." "Well, soldier," the man replied earnestly, "I'm General George Patton. And you're doing a hell of a job."

As many of you know, Dick Williams passed away this March, while I was on sabbatical. I had no chance to say goodbye. But he was among the last people I saw in December before I left on sabbatical, and our parting was a sweet one. We will meet again in another realm. But I miss him. It is often said that anyone who served at Bastogne was never the same again, and having met a number of those survivors, I suspect that is true. But it is not true in the same way. Some of the people who survived the ordeal of Bastogne came away from the experience permanently haunted. They had seen too much, suffered too much, endured too much. They survived the experience but came away so scarred that their enjoyment of their remaining days would be forever impaired. But that was not true of everyone. Others had seen the same horrors as their compatriots, endured the same hardships, suffered the same losses, but came away with a very different perspective. After surviving that horrific experience they regarded everyday afterward as a gift of pure grace, pure gravy, pure gift from God. The late Dick Williams was one of those people.

I knew Dick for over ten years before I was even aware that he was part of the heroic defense at Bastogne. Then one day over lunch I asked, "Dick, wasn't it really cold there?" He said, matter of factly, "Oh yeah. I had such severe frostbite on my feet that I spent several months at Walter Reed." My point is, having endured unimaginable horrors, he came away from the experience with the sense that God had delivered him from the worst valley of the shadow of death that he would ever know, and he would treat every day of the rest of his life as an inestimable gift of grace. He resolved that, henceforth, he would do all within his power to live as a blessing for others. As many of us can testify, he did just that. No church member in our fellowship was more faithful in circulating throughout our congregation. No one was a more faithful caretaker of people in need. No one was more solicitous in cheering the lonely, in tending the sick, in comforting those who mourned and in encouraging those who were despairing. In short, to the very best of his ability he blessed all the lives with his love, and as he blessed others, he communicated a joy that he felt himself privileged to live as a blessing. He emanated a sense of being privileged to serve the living God. He never lived unto himself. He lived as a blessing unto others because he knew himself to be blessed by God.

The promise that God gave to Abraham, our spiritual forefather, was a simple one at heart: "I will make of you a blessing." We are heirs of that promise.

To be blessed by God and to be a blessing is the spiritual legacy that has been passed down to us from one generation of faithful believer to the next.

How much more focused on creative goodness might we be

if we started each morning by claiming a three-word command as our mantra for the day: "Be a blessing!"

Our faith at its simplest level can be explained succinctly:

"Our life is a blessing from God. In turn, we live to bless other people."

That sounds so trite in cynical ears, I suppose.

Yet when one sees such a simple commitment embodied in the active and joyous faith of someone like Dick Williams, one comes to realize what a great challenge and powerful testimony such an approach to life can be.

The apostle Paul offered us his own elegant restatement of God's command to be a blessing.

He counseled us to "present ourselves as living sacrifices . . ."

In so doing we follow after the example of our Lord who offered his own life as a living sacrifice by which all the people of the world could be blessed.

His resolve to live as a blessing allowed him to regard his own body and blood as symbols of God's costly love.

We who would celebrate that Supper in deed as well as ritual would do well to ask ourselves,

"What word can we say that will uplift? What gesture can we make that will resurrect another from sadness?

What smile can we offer that would redeem? What truth can we communicate that will free?

What mercy can we offer that might inspire joy?"

Our Lord patterns for us through the Supper what it means to be a living sacrifice,

and from the earliest believers onward, we who have accepted his mandate to be the earthly body of Christ have sought to follow in his footsteps by living as a blessing which all the world would be blessed.

And so, by his bread and his cup we look upon these symbols as signs of the wondrous fact that God in Christ has blessed us.

Yet, also, by partaking this bread and cup we receive the energy to look forward to the opportunity to be a blessing in the lives of those we encounter.

As we eat this bread and drink this cup, let us resolve to hear God's command in our ears: "Be a blessing!"

With this thought in mind, let us approach and participate in the table of our Lord.

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Communion Sunday