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“Driven by Faith.....not by Reason”

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Dr. Bill Clemmer

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

It is a joy to be with you this morning...this is kind of a homecoming...but has been quite a trip.

I left my family in the Congo a week ago Friday and have spent the past 10 days in eight different states; I came down with Malaria in Baltimore on Tuesday and spent 2 days with 104 fever with a blanket around my shoulders shaking in all day long meetings I attended(the malaria was likely from a mosquito that bit me as I was boarding the plane to leave Congo; sort of a going away present). Yesterday I spent 14 hours on the road driving from Washington D.C. to the Cape half of that in traffic half of that just getting across the bridge. Last night I spent the night at my parents in South Yarmouth and the drive to Brewster this morning was nostalgic. I used to date a girl in South Dennis during high school and the joyous anticipation of visiting her years ago almost compared to my anticipation visiting you this morning. (I am really happy to be here).

Tomorrow morning I board a plane for Paris and from there another plane to the African continent to the Democratic Republic of Congo . Late Tuesday night I will touch down in Kinshasa (assuming there is no coup) where I will be reunited with my wife Ann and children. So...near the end of my travels today; weary from malaria and down to my last clean shirt....all may not be well with my body...but I can assure you that all is very well with my soul. Amen.

As a way of getting started I would like to share my testimonyand call to missions:

I came to know Jesus as my Lord and Savior while working in Africa several years ago. My dream when I finished college was to get married, become a school teacher, have lots of kids and be active in our local community. It's funny how God often has a different plan....and uses circumstances to make that happen.

Things didn't turn out how I planned them; so I joined Peace Corps upon graduating from college. I was sent to the country of Mali where I was assigned to an obscure post on the fringes of the Sahara desert; 150km NW of Timbuktu to teach mathematics in a French speaking high school. I had two years of French in junior high on the Cape and someone in PC Washington must have thought I was an expert in French.

I was alone in the desert.....well me and 1000 Tuaregs...and you know there is not a lot to do in that part of the world after work. No roads, no electricity, no stores, no malls...I had brought 6 paperback books with me to the desert; one of which was a Bible. I read the paperback novels twice over...and then out of sheer boredom started to read the Bible.

I read the beatitudes which is a part that makes most people feel good about themselves.....blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (yup that's what I was doing in Africa)...God must be proud

of me...but then in that same chapter I read the cutting words of Jesus during his sermon on the mount in Matthew chapter 5....and he said unto them (listen to this): unless you have the righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees you have not an inkling of hope of entering the kingdom of heaven Wait a minute, these words were a tad terrifying, I knew about those 'Scribes and Pharisees'...I had studied them in theology in Boston College ... the Scribes and Pharisees were the righteous of the righteous. Both parties had the entire Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—completely committed to memory. The Pharisees made it their life's ambition to follow every syllable of the Mosaic Law. In Jesus' day the Pharisees quibbled about whether it was lawful for a Jew to eat an egg a chicken laid on the Sabbath, because the chicken had broken the Sabbath law.

If my righteousness has to exceed these guys...I'm in deep trouble. All of a sudden this lamebrain idea about leaving Cape Cod, going to an obscure corner of the world, surrounded by strange speaking Tauregs on camels and teaching high school mathematics in French.....as a way of pleasing God....may not have been the brightest plan I ever hatched. Maybe God won't be impressed after all I wondered. And then I read on.....all your good works if they are done with the thought of earning your way to heaven are like filthy rags before the Lord. I was starting to realize 'plan A' was a non-starter.

.....and then just when Jesus got my attention....the tone changed.....for my fathers will is that all who come to me; I will keep...and his promises.....if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved.....for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life..... for God sent his son into the world , not to condemn the world, but to save the world.and as a promise....he put his seal on the agreement (2 corinth 1:22) He will set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come ...

And I remember the night when it all made sense. I lived in a mud brick house in the desert. During the heat of the desert day; these adobe houses would offer shelter from the scorching sun...but by late afternoon they were like brick ovens. My house had a flat roof and stairs to the roof.....and I had put my bed up on the roof to sleep at night...and when you lie down and look up; the heaven is a panorama of stars .and we are just a little speck.....and I remember telling God.....I get it; its all about you and not me... Christianity has everything to do with what you have done for us ...and not what I could ever do... My true worth is not based on my success or failure....but on the fact that I am 'your child'....and your promise of eternal life is premised not on acts but by faith....and I accepted God's words on it.

Well my soul was changed...but like this morning in Brewster I found myself in the same weary old body.....Peace Corps was good but it had lost its luster; the novelty had long worn off with day after day of 130 degree heat. I wrote the Peace Corps office in the capital city of Bamako...

Dear sirs, this has been a good experience but you know its kind of lonely up here in the desertand no one to speak English to. Do you think you could transfer me to another post where there are other teachers (and perhaps less heat). Dear Bill...glad that things are going well....second teacher coming this Fall...a Mr. Bob from Brooklyn...good to hear you are enjoying your work...PC HQ BK. All right I thought...I can make it until next year. And then

the Fall came (well September actually ...there are no seasons in the desert).....and the long awaited arrival...and off stepped not Mr. Bob but Miss Ann...long blond hair tied in the back, light blue summer dress, fresh from South Carolina...I remember thinking either I had been in the desert too long....or this is a girl. I never knew and never asked what happened to Mr. Bob.....nor did I ask Peace Corps for anything again.

Ann was a new believer; she had come to know Jesus as her Lord and Savior at the University of South Carolina and felt a call to go overseas..... but was not sure in what capacity. We had much in common.... most of all our new found faith. One day an African Pastor came through town (there weren't many pastors as Mali is a Muslim country) and we were baptized together in a pool of water by the Niger River.

During that time in the desert I felt a strong call to foreign missions....not to earn my way to heaven; that was assured.... but as a way to serve God. I remember reading in the Bible (I had started to read every day) about 'taking up the yoke of Jesus' and the invitation to replace my burdens for his....and I started thinking; what in the world could Jesus be burdened about....and the answer was right there before me... the lost, the sick, the hurt, the suffering. Those are the things that Jesus is concerned about...and that in a nutshell was my call to missions.

I decided to go into medicine to fulfill that call (which was good since I did not have the gifts to be a pastor or church planter). I took my MCATS at the American Embassy in Bamako, Mali and was accepted at medical schools in Boston and Washington D.C. (I think they were more impressed by my exploits in Africa than my grades at Boston College). I ended up attending a school in Washington D.C. instead of Boston. You see, my wife, Ann, (yes we got married) grew up in a very conservative Southern home with a family who had some rather strange ideas about the North....they would let their daughter go clear across the globe to Africa but the thought of moving to Boston with a Yankee was unthinkable...

We were married in a Southern Baptist Church in D.C. and then came back to New England for my residency where we joined an American Baptist Church. I worked as an ER Doctor in New Hampshire for a few years to pay off my debts....and when we were debt free and fully trained, we returned overseas to a calling we heard so clearly in the desert ten years hence. We have four children; Jasmine, Eli, Joel and Cassie; the last one born during a coup attempt in Haiti. Surrendering our wills to God has not always meant a comfortable life....but it has been exciting and fulfilling and God has been good and has blessed us beyond all expectations.

For those of you with a background in health care; practicing medicine in the Congo is a tad different than here in the states.....We don't have waiting rooms but waiting lines...lines which sometimes extend beyond the horizon. The days are finished when the sun goes down rather than when everyone is seenand those left in line (as long as they're not in labor) wait until the next day. We rely on our hands and stethoscope more than lab tests or x-rays. The standard of care is compassion and we only make mistakes known to man.

Living overseas in a place like Africa is a wonderful setting to raise children and to grow a marriage.....we have few distractions besides each other; no shopping malls or movie theaters or after school sports event. The people are wonderful, the work fulfilling, the landscape and rivers and forests full of life and challenges.

There are been some downsides; there are in any walk of life. Our challenges have been of a different nature; Congo has gone through a series of civil wars and the problems of Rwanda are familiar to Congo. I have seen the horrors of genocide and been in an out of more refugee camps than I can remember; I have been detained and arrested by rebel troops and once threatened with the loss of my ears. . My family had to twice leave Congo because of fighting the first time for 6 months and the second for 11.....and I have never known life could be so lonely without children. But God in all instances assured us that we are not alone....countless times during the wars; rebels enroute to our hospital or nursing school were thwarted by missing road signs, washed out bridges, broken down vehicles....and angels by the side of the road directing them elsewhere.

We currently live in the capital city of Kinshasa a busy and sometimes volatile city of 7 million persons where as a foreigner you wouldn't want to be in the wrong neighborhood. A few months ago my wife Ann was in our jeep driving our youngest daughter Cassie to her friend's house when her car suddenly broke down in a bad section of town where another car a few yards in front of her had just caught on fire and was engulfed in flames.. Ann couldn't get off the road and a crowd of young people came up to her car and started to taunt and pound on the windows. She radioed me right away but I was a good 20 minutes away. People have died in less time. Suddenly as Ann was in the car trying to calm down our youngest daughter Cassie a large Congolese police woman approached Ann's window and told her to put the vehicle in neutral....the policewoman then enlisted 3 young men from the crowd to push the car off the road away from the burning vehicle..... and then stood by Ann's window and stared down a glaring crowd of angry youths who one-by-one dropped their rocks. I arrived 20 minutes later approaching the car from the passenger side and picked up Cassie and helped Ann out and into my car. Ann told me to thank the policewoman next to her door; but when I went around there was no one there. I walked up to several policemen who were controlling the crowd, wanting to thank the woman who had saved Ann's life. The police looked at me like I was from another planet....there is no policewoman in this neighborhood...you must have been mistaken. But God is not mistaken and allows the likes of angels to keep us well...even when we don't know.

That doesn't mean that bad things don't happen in life they do...but when we are allowed to see the hand of God in life's joys and tragedies.....life's problems and circumstances somehow don't seem that tragic. God allows suffering and pain in this imperfect world; there is no doubt of that... but He also assures us that nothing escapes His purpose...and we are never alone.

I have loved every minute of this job..... and can attest that the greatest joy and the safest place for any of us is right in the center of God's will . When I think I could have passed all this up and have been a tenured math teacher at D-Y I shudder (I hope there are no high school math teachers in the crowd today)

For these past several weeks your church has been on a 40 days of purpose campaign based on Rick Warren's book....The Purpose Driven Life ...

I have just started to read the book so many of your are ahead of me...but one common theme throughout the book is that life is not 'accidental' ...and our primary purpose; above all other goals is to:

love God with all our heart
love our neighbors as ourselves

Many of us get the love God part correct...but how much do we love others; not just those like us but especially those different from us....I'll close with a story from the book of Acts:

In Acts chapter 10 (9-16) we read about Peter after the encounter on the beach; in the city of Joppa (listen to this our last story)

About noon the following day as they were approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat and while the meal was being prepared he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him. "Get up Peter, Kill and eat". Surely not, my Lord!" Peter replied, "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean"" The voice spoke to him a second time. "(Peter)...do not call anything impure that God has made clean" This happened three times and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

I imagine that Peter in his Jewish culture considered his culture the best, and habits and customs and foods of other cultures were "unclean". I know when I first came to Africa 20 years ago (to Mali) and saw it with my American eyes, many things seemed "unclean" I liked to bathe by myself, in a tub; not in the brown Niger river with other men and women and children...and snakes and hippos; that may have seemed "unclean" if not "unhealthy" to my American eyes. When I eat, I like to have my own bowl, or my own cup, or my own utensils...in Mali, I ate with a family; everyone sits in front of the same bowl and eats with their hands. That may seem unclean to my American eyes... I like to sleep in a nice fluffy bed with sheets, not on a straw mat on the floor; so in my eyes, Africa could have seemed "unclean"...but God told Peter, as he tells me that nothing he created is "unclean"

You see if I use my American eyes and see only unclean food and unclean habits and unclean customs...then my conclusion may be "unclean people"

the unclean Thais
the unclean Cambodians,
the unclean Indonesians
the unclean Malians

but to get this idea out of our head, God said to Peter three times

Not unclean
Not unclean
Not unclean

When God said to Peter 3 times that their food was not unclean, Peter understood that their people were not unclean.....and proceeded the next day to the house of Cornelius the Roman centurion....and presented the Gospel of Jesus to him. You see Peter was teachable later in life.... which I find encouraging at my age.

The point is.... it is never too late too be used by God.... whether you are just out of college, just out of a career.....or just out of a marriage, or out of any circumstance in your life...our God is a patient God and one of 2nd and 3rd chances (just ask Peter after he denied Jesus or the Samaritan woman at the well.). He invites us to take his yoke upon our shoulders and exchange our burdens for his....the temporal for the eternal; the seen for the unseen.

I believe God is in the process of changing lives and doing wonderful things in Africa and in America. He invites us to be a part of His work if we are willing. What we plan to do for God in this world is not half as important as what He plans to do with us ...and if we are driven by logic or reason rather than by faith....we might just lose out on the experience of a lifetime.”

If we are available and say here I am Lord; use me, mold me, make me transform me into an instrument of your peace and love.....it will be the most wonderful experience in your life....and don't worry about any gifts you may or may not have...God doesn't call the enabled...but enables the called.