

Thank You, Christchurch!

“I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me” (Psalm 13:6)

I love Easter. It is perhaps the foremost celebratory day for Christians! It is the day we celebrate that Christ rose again from the grave after having died for our sins on the cross of Calvary. I am not like some who put down the Easter eggs, baskets, chocolate rabbits, baby chicks and spring flowers. I am aware of pagan practices that had similar spring rituals. But as a child I looked at these as add ons to an event that immortalizes spring, i.e. the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Every spring flower reminds me that Christ lives and we too shall live. One of the nice traditions of Easter is wearing our best. This was the day when our parents dressed us up in our “Sunday best.” When I was a child, I remember a dear member of our church took my brother and me to a huge department store downtown Washington D.C. When we came home, we each had a new suit of clothes, which we wore for the first time on Easter.

One week ago, our church decided to put, not a new set of clothes, but a new car in the pastor’s driveway. Mrs. Pope and I were speechless. So sitting out in our parking spot is a car that says, “I love you,” from Christchurch. Also, my wife is most appreciative of the beautiful ruby ring you gave her. We were reminded that the number 40 is commemorative of a fortieth anniversary. Forty in biblical numerology is the number of new beginnings. As Dr. Keen pointed out last week, it was the number of days Noah’s flood lasted, before civilization started again. It was the number of days Jesus was tempted before He began His ministry. It was the number of years Israel wandered before they possessed their possessions in the Promised Land. So the car and the ring symbolize the forty years of ministry that cause me to rededicate my life to Christ afresh and anew. In this brief article I want to write an open letter to Christchurch to say, “Thank you.”

1. God does give the desire of our hearts.

I thought it very apropos that Deacon Michael Dickenson read Psalm 37:4 which says, *“Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart”* (Psalm 37:4). One of our teens expressed to his mom, “Wow, if only Pastor had desired something better!” I then remarked, “You mean like a Cadillac?” She said, “Well, no, he had something more in mind like a Corvette.” We had a good laugh, but seriously, I could not have been happier with any other car. I have had this “love affair” with the Mini Cooper for close to seven years. I like the way it looks, handles and I would be able to get into places where Suburbans dare not tread. Once in a while I would come home saying, “It took me longer at the hospital because I could not find a parking space, but if I had a Mini, it would have been no problem.”

I am burdened about those who do not have the convenience of even one automobile to drive. It is such a nice gift that I almost feel under conviction having received it. Yet, I am deeply touched that God would not only give us the needs, but often the very desires of our heart. And even more so, that it would come through Christchurch is most humbling! My wife and I had been saving, but we found that every time we got ahead, an appliance would go out or medical or dental bills would overwhelm us, so that we were having to go to the automobile allocation and it looked like the desires of my heart would have to be put on hold again while a practical frugality was leading me to settle for something less, something different. Thank you, Christchurch, for the desire of our heart.

2. God does answer prayer.

In the mornings after I try to hallow the name of God, pray God’s kingdom come, His will be done, I would pray the He would give us this day our daily bread. I often ran this prayer of a vehicle by the Lord, but not to the neglect of our church needs and family needs, whether spiritual or physical. I would almost smile and in kindness ask the Lord to fulfill this prayer for a vehicle.

It has done my heart a world of good to see the Lord answer a specific prayer. Jesus said, *“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you”* (Matthew 7:7). *“And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive”* (Matthew 21:22). Specific answered prayer states the veracity of God’s Word. It underlies the root of the miraculous. It calms the troubled soul. It boosts our faith to believe Him more. It bears witness to the lost community that there is a God and He is real, when He answers specific prayer. There are many more things of greater importance - local and world evangelism, backsliders to be reclaimed and revival to come to our land - that this recent answer to prayer has encouraged my heart to seek God with even greater fervency. *“...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”* (James 5:16).

3. The pastor and his people share a good relationship together.

If anyone doubted the amicable relationship between this pastor and his people, this act of benign kindness dispels any or all doubt. *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”* (Psalm 133:1). What a joy to pastor a flock that allows me to pastor! Along with this privilege comes an awesome responsibility to be faithful to this trust.

As I travel our land I am grieved to see a pastor and church not getting along together. This is not the way God planned it. I can say with Paul, *“But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity”* (Philippians 4:10). And now when you had the opportunity, you spoiled your pastor by saying to his wife and him, *“We love you.”* You have fulfilled and exceeded the Scripture that says, *“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine”* (I Timothy 5:17).

4. It reminds me to stay close to Jesus, all the way.

In light of I Timothy 5:17, this gift makes me want to make sure I am worthy of double honour by ruling well and excelling in understanding and delivering the Word and doctrine.

On my thirtieth anniversary in the ministry, a couple of young men who had been reared up in our church gave me a most unique gift. It was a photograph of Billy Sunday, framed with a personal note he had written many years ago to someone that stated in the evangelist’s own handwriting, *“Stay close to Jesus, all the way”*, W. A. Sunday. Through the years this has challenged me to do exactly that. Now with the kind word from our governor, the ring, and the car... I am determined more than ever to draw closer to the Lord than ever before and with a rededicated heart, go on to serve Christ better than ever! *“Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!”* (Psalm 107:8, 21, 31).

- Pastor Pope

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