

## **March 10-12, 2012 – Naked in the Pulpit**

I see stained glass, a diamond pattern on a larger piece with a circle of clear glass in its center. The diamond pattern has primarily four colors: red, blue, yellow and green. The colors shift and move about.

Stepping back, I see the rest of the window, it's tall and narrow, circular at the top. I'm inside what I think is an older church building. I'm standing at the front of the sanctuary facing the wall on the right. There's a long row of stained-glass windows on each side wall. Except for the light coming in through the windows, it's pretty dark in here. There isn't much light at all. The walls and floor are hard, made of some type of stone.

I hear the click clack of high heel shoes on the hard-stone floor coming from the back of the room. Turning to my right, I see a tall blonde woman in a white dress with red polka dots walking down the center aisle. She's wearing a large white hat and sunglasses. She takes a seat in a pew about half way down the center aisle.

As soon as she's seated, I see a young man enter. He's wearing jeans, a white tee shirt and a leather jacket, very James Dean-esque. He removes his sun glasses as he walks in and takes the last seat in the back on the right.

A small boy and girl burst in through the back doors, both running down the center aisle. They look about seven or eight years old. He has red hair and freckles. She's chasing after him with her blonde pig tails trailing behind her. Looking back tauntingly at what I assume is his sister; he runs right into me and bounces off my legs. They both stop abruptly and look up startled to see me. With a quick look at each other they run off together giggling. An embarrassed mom and annoyed dad rush in quietly trying to catch up and corral their energetic kids. They're dressed every bit the part of the proper 1960-ish white middle-class family; he in a grey suit and tie with matching hat, she in a simple white dress with a dark belt. A string of pearls, white handbag, and proper shoes complete the look.

Soon people flood in from the rear doors and both side entrances until the sanctuary is filled. Everyone's seated waiting for the service to begin.

Looking down at myself for the first time, I realize that I'm wearing a floor length, button down, black, priest's cassock with a white clerical collar.

There must be three or four hundred people gathered; ladies in hats, men in suits. The room is dotted with children fussing about as mothers struggle to settle them down. It feels like an Easter Sunday service from my childhood. All eyes are on me - obviously waiting for me to begin the service. I don't know exactly where I am or even when I am, but instinctively I walk to the pulpit - thinking to myself, I've done this before, I can do this...

As I step into the pulpit, a loud collective gasp fills the room. Looking up I can see women covering their children's eyes with their hands and husbands covering their wives' eyes with their hats. All over the room angry husbands and fathers stand indignantly, shake their heads at me and storm out of the church; families in tow.

Confused, I look around trying to locate the source of the problem. Then back down at myself. I'm the problem. Yep, that's right; I'm standing naked in the pulpit - with only a white clerical collar tight around my neck. First shocked, then humiliated, I look for something, anything to cover myself, but I can't find a thing.

Out of nowhere a resolute boldness rises up in me. A passionate zeal, what John Wimber use to call "unction" bubbles up from deep within me. With fire in my eyes, I grip the pulpit tightly and begin to preach the word of God with boldness, power and authority. While preaching I can feel the ground beneath us begin to shake. As I keep going, the shaking continues and so do I. It feels like a full-blown earthquake yet I STILL keep preaching - even as the walls of the church start to crumble around us.

When the shaking stops and the dust begins to settle, I can see that all of the respectable families have left the building. The lady in the red polka dot dress hasn't moved, neither has the James Dean biker dude in the back. I see others now; a gypsy looking older woman, a couple of drug addicts, two gals that could easily be prostitutes, a few hippy/artist types and some college aged students. They're not even remotely offended. If anything, they're intrigued and engaged. The pews are still in place, but the ceiling is completely gone. The walls too except for some corner posts.

As I'm looking around, Jesus appears next to me, on my left and says:

**“Welcome home.”**

I'm still standing in the pulpit. From behind me and on my right, I can see a gust of wind rush through the ruins of the sanctuary. From one corner diagonally across to the other. Three times I see this, one right after the other until the only thing I see is the building's foundation. It looks like a concrete slab; It's clean, white, and surprisingly without a crack.

A little while later Jesus appears. He's leaning over a blueprint attached to a makeshift workbench made of a piece of plywood on two saw horses. He looks every bit the part of a modern-day carpenter. Jeans, work boots, red and blue flannel shirt over a white tee, sleeves partially rolled up, and tool belt in place. I notice that the workbench is set up right over the spot where the blonde-haired lady in the polka dot dress had been sitting.

Jesus looks up from the blueprints and motions for me to come over. Stepping down from the pulpit, (hmm... I guess it survived) I walk over to Jesus. I'm still naked.

As soon as I reach him, he removes his tool belt and places it around my waist and says:

**“I will build my church  
and the gate of hell will not prevail against it.”**

As soon as the tool belt is set in place everything else Jesus was wearing appears on me; boots, jeans, red and blue flannel shirt and white tee. I look just like him. He continues:

**“My ways are not your ways. I build differently than you build.  
Here, let me show you a more excellent way.”**

Looking down at the blue prints instead of a building diagram, I see the words of 1 Corinthians 13:

*<sup>1</sup> If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I*

*have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

*<sup>4</sup> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

*<sup>8</sup> Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup> but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. <sup>12</sup> For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*

*<sup>13</sup> And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*

As I read through the text, I can see a new building appear around us - piece by piece, board by board and window by window. Two changes quickly capture my attention. First, this new building is round - not rectangular. And second, the windows are clear, clean transparent glass. They more closely resemble house windows than stained glass windows. Everything has an uncluttered, open and simple feel to it, minimalistic.

The next thing I notice is the pedestal the pulpit sat on is also gone... not only is the pedestal gone, but so is the pulpit itself.

Everything is white. White walls, floor, and a white ceiling. White chairs set up in a circular pattern. A lot of light floods in through the windows. I can see bright green leaves from low hanging tree branches on the other side of the window. Four aisles cut the circular rows of chairs into four wedges with a large opening in the center. Jesus leads me over to sit in the front row. Walking over, our clothes change again. Jesus in a bright white tunic.

I'm in loose fitting tan pants and an oversized tan shirt that reminds me of hospital scrubs or pajamas.

Jesus sits on the aisle at the end of the row and at his invitation I take the first seat to his left. With his left arm over my shoulder and a smile on his face Jesus says:

**“You have labored all night long. Rest, watch and learn.”**

Jesus gets up from his seat and walks to the center of the circle. Turning so I can see him, he raises his arms and begins to worship, singing the most amazing love song to Papa. My heart melts. With his face lifted toward heaven, tears run down his face... and I cry too. The worship is so sweet and pure.

After a while, the song changes as Jesus proclaims his passionate love for his bride. I swear I could hear a beautiful three-part harmony, the Trinity's love song for the church. As music fills the atmosphere, colors fill the air. Streaking lights... bursts of color... it's awe inspiring, it's beautiful and, absolutely amazing!

Across the room I can see people suddenly appear. First one then another and another appearing in the seats; young, old, black, white, Hispanic, and Asian. All with arms raised in sweet worship. This goes on and on until every seat is filled.

My perspective changes. I'm hovering above looking down upon this amazing expression of worship and mutual love - Bridegroom to bride and bride to bridegroom. Jesus, next to me says:

**“Pay attention Tom: the what is the same, the how is different.”**

With those words today's vision ends and I'm reminded of Luke 5...

*<sup>1</sup> One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. <sup>2</sup> He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.*

<sup>4</sup> When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

<sup>5</sup> Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

<sup>6</sup> When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. <sup>7</sup> So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

<sup>8</sup> When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" <sup>9</sup> For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, <sup>10</sup> and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." <sup>11</sup> So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him