

The Pastor's Quarry

First Baptist Church of Granite Falls, MN
October, 2007

Showing Your True Colors

The air was still, and the sun was generous with the last of its warmth for the season. From our place on the wooded hillside, my son and I gazed across a small valley at the rising forest beyond. Resplendent in autumn colors, the once-green forest was a profusion of yellow, orange, and red leaves.

Crowning the distant hill was the most beautiful tree I had ever seen. Never had I seen such a large and full head of leaves, nor such a vivid yellow; it drew the eye away from all lesser foliage. Hastening across the valley, I led my son toward that hill, compelled by the thought of bathing in the brilliance of that tree. And I was not disappointed. Above an untrod carpet of yellow leaves, sunlight filtered through the refulgent branches in liquid shafts of gold. In wonder, we marveled with hushed voices.

Biologists say that this brilliance was really there all summer long, hidden in the green leaves. The leaves of that golden tree, they say, did not really *gain* a yellow color in the autumn, but simply lost their green color with the stress of autumn's chill. Yellow carotenoids lay alongside the green chlorophyll in the chromoplasts of the leaf cells; when the cells lost their green chlorophyll, the yellow carotenoids were unmasked.

But for the stress of the autumn chill, that tree would have been just another green tree. But for the stress that unveiled its brilliance, I would not have even noticed it when I gazed across that valley. With the stress came beauty, and I was glad.

What are *our* true colors when we are under stress?

In times of plenty, in times of ease and comfort and tranquility, it is easy to blend in with the rest of the crowd. Without stress, we may all be like a forest of green trees, no one much more noticeable than the other. But when stress comes and unveils our true colors, then we find out what lies within one another.

Are we like King David, who wrote, "In my distress I called upon the Lord?" (Ps 18:6a) Or are we like King Ahaz, of whom it is written, "In the time of his distress he became yet more faithless to the Lord?" (2 Ch 28:22)

When the Lord proudly spoke of his servant Job to Satan, Satan snidely argued that Job's true colors were not so pretty – and that they would show through if he went through enough stress. And God promptly allowed Job's true colors to be unveiled.

Oh that we would be luminous trees of golden leaves in our time of unveiling! Oh that the great cloud of witnesses around us could marvel, with voices hushed, at the golden beams of God's grace shining through us!

And though that golden splendor be hidden from all but the watching few of this world, that moment will be worth more than a thousand years of the untested leaf, veiled in green.

Book Review: *Ideas Have Consequences*, by Richard Weaver

On the 50th anniversary (Oct. 4) of Sputnik and the inauguration of the "Space Age," it is fitting to offer this review of Richard Weaver's *Ideas Have Consequences*.

This excellent book is a concise commentary on the state of Western society today. Weaver unfolds the consequences of Occam's Razor and the subsequent ideas that led to modern empiricism. Using examples like the breakdown of social classes in the name of equalitarianism, the specialization of labor, and the progression of Shakespeare to commercial radio and Beethoven to jazz, he debunks the vaunted ideal of "progress."

Weaver argues that utilitarianism and pragmatism have replaced transcendent values. Order and hierarchy have crumbled; an obsession with meaningless "facts" has resulted in aimlessness and self-indulgence. Ultimately, people abuse those who do not gratify them. Modern man is impious; he rejects the lessons of the past because they are either confusing to him or they inhibit him. The media speeds the fragmentation of our culture by its content and by preventing thoughtful reflection – our focus is kept on what is "new." Disconnected from history and from truth, we are no longer able to agree on the meaning of words. Our culture is desperately in need of the poet and the philosopher. "Poetry," he argues, "offers the fairest hope of restoring our lost unity of mind."

Mark Your Calendars

On Saturday, October 20, at 12:30 P.M., you are invited to the parsonage for our third quarter picnic! Bring something to grill or a covered dish, if you like. Beverages provided.

On Sunday, October 21, at 1:15 P.M., we plan to conduct our third quarter business meeting during our regularly scheduled afternoon assembly.

Doctrinal Series

In Sunday School, we have been working through our statement of faith since December 24 (with a short break in May to finish up our Bible Geography series). As we begin the month of October, we have just begun studying the 12th section. There are 15 sections in all, so we have enough to keep us busy for the rest of 2007.

If you wish to study the statement of faith, you will find it in the church constitution. If you do this and come up with a question or two you would like answered, let me know, and I will study your questions as I prepare my lessons.

Pastor's Schedule

Underlined dates are times when I will be in town without my "better half."

(In Seattle Oct 2-5)
In Granite Oct 6-8
In Granite Oct 12-14
In Granite Oct 20-21
In Granite Oct 26-28
In Granite Nov 2-4
In Granite Nov 9-12
In Granite Nov 16-18
In Granite Nov 22-25

As Thy Days Thy Strength Shall Be

Author unknown*

Afflicted saint, to Christ draw near
Thy Saviour's gracious promise hear;
His faithful word declares to thee,
That as thy days thy strength shall be.

Let not thy heart despond, and say,
How shall I stand the trying day?
He has engaged, by firm decree,
That as thy days thy strength shall be.

Thy faith is weak, thy foes are strong,
And if the conflict should be long,
Thy Lord will make the tempter flee;
For, as thy days thy strength shall be.

Should persecution rage and flame,
Still trust in thy Redeemer's name;
In fiery trials thou shalt see
That as thy days thy strength shall be.

When called to bear the mighty cross
Of sore affliction, pain, or loss,
Of deep distress, or poverty;
Still, as thy days thy strength shall be.

When ghastly death appears in view,
Christ's presence shall thy fears subdue;
He comes to set thy spirit free,
And, as thy days thy strength shall be.

* Benjamin Lloyd, *Primitive Hymns* (Rocky Mount: The Primitive Hymns Corporation, 1999), 457-458.

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“Walk-in” office hours

10:00-12:00 A.M. Sat. in the church study, schedule permitting.

A Bit of History

When Paul embarked on his first missionary journey, a 12-year-old boy named Ignatius was destined to become the Bishop of Antioch half a century later. But it would not be until the autumn of his life that Ignatius would be allowed to show his true colors in all their splendor.

When Ignatius was 63, the Roman Emperor Trajan rose to power. Trajan wrote of Christians:

They are not to be sought out; if they are denounced and proved guilty, they are to be punished, with this reservation, that whoever denies that he is a Christian and really proves it – that is, by worshiping our gods – even though he was under suspicion in the past, shall obtain pardon through repentance.¹

Just what did Trajan mean when he wrote, “they are to be punished?” Ignatius found that out for himself.

At some point during Trajan's 19-year reign, Ignatius appeared before him, and Trajan sentenced him to death. As a condemned prisoner, Ignatius endured the long voyage by land and sea, to the city of Rome, to be devoured by beasts in the arena for the amusement of bloodthirsty spectators.

On this journey, Ignatius wrote six letters to as many churches, and one to a fellow bishop. These letters are filled with words of love, encouragement, instruction, and exhortation. Chained to soldiers, with a horrific death looming, Ignatius was devoted to God's glory in the church.

But even more remarkable was his attitude about the horror he faced. In his letter to the Romans, he begged them not to intervene; he wanted to die a martyr's death:

Suffer me to become food for the wild beasts . . . I am the wheat of God, and let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ. . . . Let fire and the cross; let the crowds of wild beasts; let tearings, breakings, and dislocations of bones; let cutting off of members; let shatterings of the whole body; and let all the dreadful torments of the devil come upon me: only let me attain to Jesus Christ. . . . It is better for me to die in behalf of Jesus Christ, than to reign over all the ends of the earth.²

How Ignatius loved Jesus! He wrote to the Ephesians, “Let my spirit be counted as nothing for the sake of the cross.”³

Ignatius constantly prepared for the hour of trial. He wrote to the Trallians that he fought against the temptation of pride, and desired meekness in the hour of his death:

Now it is needful for me to be the more fearful; and not give heed to those that puff me up . . . For I do indeed desire to suffer, but I know not if I be worthy to do so . . . I therefore have need of meekness, by which the prince of this world is brought to nought.⁴

Truly Ignatius ran with endurance the race set before him.

And when the lions pulled Ignatius down, his true colors were emblazoned on the pages of history – for eternity.

¹ Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, 10.96-97.

² Philip Schaff, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, vol. 1 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995) 75-77.

³ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.