



*Dan Nolta*

Defining moments: We all have them in our lives. I have easily identified my own, such as experiencing my parents' divorce, getting cut from the freshman boys basketball team, and walking into Medford Friends Church as a lost and seeking sixteen-year-old.

Just as easily identified are the Scripture verses that have defined my spiritual life. They have given my faith foundation, provided its boundaries, lifted me when I was in the "basement" of despair, and provided the clashing cymbal when I was celebrating the gracious bounty of God. They have also defined my hope for the last earthly days I shall live and the eternal days to come. For easy focus I have included each Scripture along with the thought for the day.

May my sharing cause you to seek out or perhaps highlight again those Scriptures that God has given which define your relationship with him.

In this photo my wife Judi and I are pictured in front of our new Friendsview Retirement Community residence. Our journey to this place will be highlighted on Friday of this week.

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 139:15-16*

“My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

I remember, when I was a boy, my mother going into a place to talk with a so-called fortune teller. Why I remember this, I don't know; but I do know that even at that tender age, her seeking knowledge of the future made an impression on me.

We all wonder about what is to come. From weather to economic forecasts, we all want to know. We carry an umbrella, buy gold, or keep emergency supplies based on how seriously we believe the prognosticators.

Better for us to remember that only God knows the final outcome in this game of life. As our Scripture says, “...Before one of them came to be.” Before the game is played, God knows the final score. He ordained it, he wrote it in his book, and he knows it all. This is not the time for the Calvin versus Arminius debate—God just knows.

As for my generation, Y2K was a non-event, my generator has been largely unused, and my stocks and bonds still plug along. Yet I find peace in the promises of God's plan for me: “I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11).

*SONG: Precious Lord, Take My Hand*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, I am grateful that you knew when I did not; your spirit provided peace when mine could not; your provision was enough when mine was not; and you loved me when I did not.*

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*BIBLE READING: John 6:68-69*

“Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.’”

As I grow older, the truth of the words and their implications grow. I have accepted and have become dependent upon these truths: Jesus is the Holy One of God. He alone has the words of eternal life. I have nowhere else to go.

Fortunately for me, I know it is not due to my good works, my good reputation, my good family, my money, or my possessions. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. And in the final analysis, I find that there is nowhere else to go. If he did not die for my sins, then I am still in my sin and my hope for eternal life in heaven is lost...done...over.

Since that night in Medford Friends Church, when and where I “staked my life” and believed with Peter, there has been an abiding peace. Every decision, every act of my life is built on that foundation. My past, present, and future rest in his loving hands; I rejoice in the confidence that brings.

*SONG: Blessed Assurance*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, may the assurance of who you are and what you have done for me be mine each and every day.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: 2 Thessalonians 3:10*

“For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule:  
“The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.””

My grandmother said, “I will give you fifty cents for each gallon you pick.” I dutifully went off to pick blackberries and thoroughly enjoyed spending the fifty cents my labor brought. I was taught to work at an early age and, in some perverse way, still enjoy it to this day.

But something has happened since my early childhood in the 40s. Millions are on food stamps. In the grocery line, able-bodied people in front of me easily pull out the state-issued debit card to pay for expensive food items that I seldom buy; then they use their cash for soda pop, beer, cigarettes, doughnuts. I do a slow burn, and then go home feeling guilty for being judgmental.

Echoing in my head and heart is the holistic rule: “If a man will not work, he shall not eat.” Long before I understood Scripture, I knew that work was good for more than a man’s stomach. Work is good for the head and good for the heart. In balance, work gives meaning and enables sufficiency, generosity, and a compassionate exercise of faith.

*SONG: The Lord’s Prayer*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, bless those today who cannot work; provide for their every need. And bless those who will not work with a renewed sense of self, a fresh look at the potential within, and renewed energy to try again. Forgive my judgmental spirit and give me a compassionate heart for those in need.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 9:35-38*

“Jesus went through all the towns and villages teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’”

The Lord spoke to a tender-hearted young Christian that day in my little made-over attic room. I still remember the tears streaming down my face as I realized God wanted me to be a part of that harvest. Which specific field of harvest would come later, but I knew that God wanted me to be a part of the “threshing crew.”

Farmers might add up the number of harvested bushels, but I have not kept count, though some remain front and center in my mind. These souls are, of course, the ones with very dramatic salvation experiences. Others with less dramatic stories may escape my memory, but certainly not their own—or God’s.

I will always and forever, on this earth and into eternity, be grateful for the opportunity to participate in the harvest. It has been one of life’s great joys sharing God’s truth, scattering the seed, seeing it spring forth and grow and finally bear fruit of its own. Is there a greater God-given privilege than to be used by him in the salvation of another?

*SONG: So Send I You*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, make a way today that I may share you with someone I meet. Enable my spirit to connect with their spirit that they might hear and believe.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: Luke 8:35*

“And the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus’ feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.”

I love this Scripture passage which illustrates a dramatic difference in the life of any community’s worst nightmare. If I had never known a person whose life had been so completely and thoroughly changed by the touch of the Master, I would not be so thrilled at the story. But I have—and I am.

I don’t know the name of this “nightmare”; we just call him the “demoniac of Gadarene.” But the ones I do know, I call Sean, Jeff, Steve, Scott—all men whose stories I follow to this day. They met Jesus and their lives were never the same. Figuratively, they are today “clothed and sitting and in their right minds.” That is the King James Version’s way to describe redeemed, civil, peaceable, caring, loving servants of their Master.

The words define salvation in Christ; the lives demonstrate salvation in Christ. These individuals are the incarnation of the promise: “If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17a). They live it, and I love it. These people affirm my own faith. They encourage me to share the good news with others; they define salvation.

*SONG: Redeemed, How I Love to Proclaim It*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you for the testimony of the redeemed, with their words of faith and their lives a walking demonstration of your power to change the human heart. Thank you for the testimony of \_\_\_\_\_.*

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*BIBLE READING: John 14:27*

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.

I do not give to you as the world gives.

Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

Early on, John 14:27 was chosen as my “life verse.” Throughout my Christian life, God has so abundantly provided, protected, and guided that at times I felt guilty and asked, “Why me, Lord?” Life went on with little threat to my peace, in spite of my appointed ministry as a pastor and then police chaplain; and as such, each and every day was filled with the tragedy and pain of others. I would be called to help someone, seek to compassionately share in their pain, and then go home to my safe and happy world.

By all accounts Judi and I were headed through a blessed life with little testing of the “peace quotient.” And then.... A little over a year ago, I received a life-altering diagnosis about a health problem, the kind of condition that begins innocently as “just old age” but usually ends very badly.

I hated it, but the test began. “My peace I give you.” Tested for the first time on the home front, I was flunking. Alternating between “I don’t like this, God” and “You have always taken care of us; will you now? I promised ‘In sickness and in health.’ But now, can I carry that out? Can I do it?”

Here we are today, one year later, always having planned on Friendsview being our final earthly home. We are here earlier than planned—but we are here. This community is a part of God’s provision for our life, and we are grateful. “Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” He could have added: “I told you so.”

*SONG: Trusting Jesus*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, I trusted you yesterday; I trust you today; I will trust you tomorrow.*

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*BIBLE READING: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18*

“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 what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

My wonderful friend Vivian Panton, Chaplain General of the Jamaican Constabulary Force, spent the last months of his life dealing with his cancer, spending part of every day alone in his room pondering on and preparing for the life which was to come. At the same time he “watched” his body waste away, he vigorously prepared his spirit for the new body in Christ that was to come.

What a powerful lesson Vivian’s funeral was to me. And now each day as I read the Scriptures and close my time with the Lord, I seek again the bookmark given at Vivian’s funeral inscribed with his picture and today’s verse. “...Renewed day by day.”

Oh yes, I too am wasting away, but I am also being prepared for “that day” when I shall cast aside this earthly body, set aside the troubles of this world, and be ushered into the eternal glory that I am assured awaits. From the temporary to the eternal is my hope.

*SONG: Standing on the Promises*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, thank you for the Scriptures that provide a steady place to stand in this world that is so shaky. Cause me—cause us—to stand on your promises until the day that our hope is replaced by the fulfillment of the promise.*

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