

Duck!

“Grampa, this is my friend, Tony.” Just like that, I was introduced to what I’m pretty sure was the oldest human being I had met in my seasoned twelve years. In his rocking chair, an ancient form was wrapped in a quilt and swayed gently in front of an open fireplace—the kind without a hearth, where coals and ashes drift out and threaten the hardwood floor. The old man simply nodded in my direction. With that, Randy’s great grandpa seemed happy to see us. “You boys goin’ huntin’?” “Yessir,” came our simultaneous reply. Grampa encouraged us, “There’ll be ducks on the tank. Just be sure to aim.” That’s all I remember the old man saying. He just sat and rocked....

That fire felt good. It was cold everywhere in that old farmhouse—everywhere except right there. Randy’s older cousin (or maybe it was his younger uncle) was taking us duck hunting on a frigid morning. I’m almost positive Randy’s cousin/uncle’s name was Bubba (seriously). Now, I’d never been duck hunting and it sounded like an adventure, but I didn’t want to leave that fire. It was more than just warm. It felt like the most peaceful place on earth.... “Let’s go! Daylight’s burnin’!” As we headed out the door, I thought I heard a whispered shout, “Good luck!”

Cold was quickly forgotten and peace was replaced with adrenaline as we crept up the side of the earthen dam that created the tank (a southern word for a man-made pond). Slowly, but with that urgency of not wanting to be left behind, we all crested the dam in a single moment. We stood there gazing upon an empty acre of water. A few trees lined the water’s edge and bullrushes with cattails thickened in the shadows below where we stood. “Dang! We must’ve missed ‘em. They might be on the north tank,” proposed our elder guide.

Shotguns returned to *safe* as we started what promised to be a long walk to the north tank. Apologetically, Bubba began to share, “I promise, there’s almost always a big—” *Whoooooosh!* I can’t really describe the sound of about 50 ducks launching simultaneously from their concealment in bullrushes and cattails but trust me, it is super-loud when you are twenty feet away and not expecting it. I’m not sure how high I jumped, but I’m positive Randy had me beat. Did any of us remember to take our shotgun’s safety off before we started pulling triggers? Bubba swore he did, but I don’t think so. After at least a one-second delay, our wits returned to us and the ensuing barrage of gunfire was quite impressive if I do say so myself.

A short walk back to the farmhouse and my sneaker-clad feet were very happy to be warming next to the coziest fire I have ever experienced. Grampa rocked quietly and seemed glad that we were back. He eventually spoke just a little louder than the crackling of the fire, “I heard the shootin’. You boys walked up on some...?” “Yessir,” again our response was simultaneous. “Hmmm,” the swaying of the rocker continued as a weathered hand pushed burning logs with an iron rod, “...you missed ‘em?” “Yessir,” sheepishly but still in unison. The old man propped his iron rod against the wall, and with aged grey-crested eyes that seemed as though they didn’t see anything, he looked right into our souls, “Didn’t sound like you was aiming,” and that was all he said.

Not entirely changing the subject, but the Hebrew word found in the Bible, that we translate as “sin” is *Khata*, which means “to miss the mark.” I believe that sometimes we sin—we miss the mark—because

we aren't aiming. We can lose sight of the target; we can go half-cocked, as they say; we can even get excited, try too hard, tense up and miss.

There is someone that wants to help us get it right—yes, I mean Jesus. The next time we become aware of missing the mark, here are a few things to remember. Focus on the mark—relationship with God; trust Jesus—take the safety off and don't be half-cocked; relax and remember to breathe—be inspired by God's Spirit.

If you know me, you know that I'm not the one to talk about hitting the mark—whether referring to sin or to shooting—but I know someone that has hit it for me. And I have faith in Him, and that gives me hope. When I cross over to the other side, I don't expect any heavenly trophies for marksmanship, but I sure want the "Old Man" to know I was aiming.

Be the church! --pastor tony