

You may have seen the story in *Guidedposts* about a young woman who had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and only had three months to live. So as she was getting things in order, she contacted her pastor and asked him to come over to arrange for her funeral. She shared with him which hymns she wanted sung at the service and her favorite scripture verses. Everything was in order and the pastor was preparing to leave when the young woman suddenly remembered something very important.

“There’s one more thing,” she said excitedly. “What’s that?” the pastor asked. “I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand,” she said. The pastor stood there looking at the young woman, not knowing what to say. “That surprises you, doesn’t it?” she asked. “Well, to be honest, I am puzzled by your request,” the pastor replied.

The young woman explained: “My grandmother once told me this story and from that time on I have always tried to pass along its message to those I love and to those who need some encouragement. In all my years of attending socials and dinners, I always remember that when the dishes of the main course were being cleared away, someone would always lean over and says: ‘Keep your fork.’ It was my favorite part of the meal because I knew that something better was coming, like velvety chocolate cake or banana pudding; something wonderful and with substance.”

“So I just want people to see me there in the casket with a fork in my right hand and I want them to wonder ‘What’s with the fork?’ Then I want you to tell them: ‘Keep your fork, the best is yet to come.’” The pastor’s eyes welled up with tears as he told the young woman goodbye realizing that this was maybe the last time he would see her before she died. He also realized that she had a better grasp of what heaven would be like than he and most people twice her age. She knew that something better was coming.

At her funeral people were walking by the young woman’s open casket and saw the fork in her right hand. Over and over again, the pastor heard the question: “What’s with the fork?” And over and over he would smile.

During his message, the pastor shared with the congregation the conversation that he had had with the young woman shortly before she died. He also told them about the fork and what it symbolized to her. He told them that he could not stop thinking about the fork and they probably would have the same problem. He was right. So the next time you reach for your fork, let it remind you that “the best is yet to come.”

The Bible is full of the promises of God like this that give us hope for the future. One of Jesus’ promises that you hear me quoting a lot is found in John 10:10 where Jesus tells us that He

came so that we may have life, more and better than we ever imagined. Another promise from the Bible that you don't hear many sermons on is found in the second chapter of 1 Corinthians, the ninth verse. I was not aware of this passage until a former head of my Federal agency quoted it one day during a speech. Since then it has become one of my favorite passages in the Bible. Listen to this promise from the Lord in 1 Corinthians 2:9 – "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him."

The *Message* paraphrases this verse as follows: "No one's ever seen or heard anything like this, never so much as imagined anything quite like it – what God has arranged for those who love Him." Here the Apostle Paul is quoting a paraphrase of Isaiah 64:4 which states: "Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear perceived, no eye has seen any God beside you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him." Isaiah and Paul are telling us that God stored up wonderful truths that could not be discovered by natural senses but which in due time He would reveal to those who love Him. Note that while Paul identifies the natural senses of sight, hearing and thought which help us learn earthly things, they fall short of comprehending the divine truths of God. To fully understand, we need the divine insight of the Holy Spirit.

Now many people have interpreted this verse as referring to the future glories of heaven, but in reality Paul is discussing the truths that have been revealed in the New Testament for the first time. We could have never arrived at these truths through scientific investigations or philosophical inquiries. The human mind, left to itself, could never discover the wonderful mysteries which have been made known to us through the Holy Spirit. Remember what Jesus said in John 14:26 – "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." Basically, Paul is saying that through Jesus and the Holy Spirit we can know God better than ever before. As I said last Sunday, because of Jesus we now have the opportunity to have a personal relationship with God, to involve Him in our daily life and to know Him better each and every day. The opportunity is there; the question is whether we have or will take advantage of this wonderful gift.

Now with this background, I want to take a different approach on this passage. For a long time, I have heard God telling me through my daily devotions to walk in faith. Now being an old dirt engineer and a Type A personality who likes to plan and get things done quickly, this has been a struggle for me. When I see a problem, I want to solve it. But God keeps telling me to be patient, to walk in faith, to not get ahead of Him, and to wait and see what He has planned for me and this church.

Can any of you relate with this? Do you ever get impatient, concerned about the future or what's going to happen next? Do you want the answers to your questions right now? Our lives are filled with unknowns and uncertainties these days. We have all been there; waiting for the

birth of a child or grandchild, looking for a job, buying a house, moving to a new location, retiring, and dealing with all the health issues of growing old. In life we basically have two options: we can either sit around and worry ourselves to death or we can walk in faith, putting our trust in the Lord.

One of the devotional books that I read each morning is entitled *My Utmost for His Highest* by Oswald Chambers. Now Mr. Chambers does not beat around the bush; he flat out states that worry is a sin. Have you ever thought of it that way? When we worry, we are not trusting in God; taking Him at His Word. In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus says a lot about worry. In verse 34, He states: "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Worry is like a rocking chair; it gives you something to do, but it will never get you anywhere.

Now faith can be defined in many ways. Faith sees what the eye can't see. In the lion's den, eyes see the prowling lion; faith sees Daniel's angel. Eyes see storm clouds and rising flood waters; faith sees Noah's rainbow. Spies to the Promised Land see giants; faith sees a land flowing with milk and honey. The world sees a cross; faith sees an empty tomb and salvation. Faith has been defined as "trusting in God's promises."

There is a story about a man who walks across a deep canyon on a guidewire that stretched from one side of the canyon to the other. It was a long way across and the wire was high above the canyon floor. The man using a pole to balance himself goes slowly across to the other side and then comes back. When he gets back, the crowd cheers his courageous feat. Then the man lays his pole down and gets a wheelbarrow and pushes it over and back on the guidewire. The crowd cheers even louder. A man runs up to him and says: "Brother, that's what I call real faith." To which the daredevil replies: "If you want to see real faith, brother, then get in the wheelbarrow and let me push you across!"

Sometimes in life we feel like we are walking on a tightrope suspended over the Grand Canyon. It is at times like these that we must put our trust in the Lord, climb into His wheelbarrow of love and let Him carry us across. Like a wheelbarrow, every tomorrow has two handles. We can take hold of tomorrow with the handle of anxiety and worry or with the handle of faith. God is always calling us to get into His wheelbarrow, walk in faith and see where He will take us.

We don't know what the future holds or what plans the Lord has in store for us as individuals and as a church, but taking the promise in our scripture text to heart, we know that we haven't seen anything yet, the best is yet to come! When we step out in faith and follow where Jesus is leading, Jesus provides opportunities that we never dreamed of.

In the first three chapters of the Book of Revelation, Jesus writes a letter to the seven churches in Asia Minor. In the letter to the Church in Philadelphia in the third chapter, the eighth verse,

Jesus says: "See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut." The *Message* paraphrases it this way: "I've opened a door before you that no one can slam shut." I call this the Door of Opportunity that is placed before each church and every Christian; the opportunity of service in the name of the Lord; to love our neighbors as ourselves; the opportunity to fulfill the Great Commission to make disciples.

So, where has God been asking me to step out in faith? What doors of opportunity are God opening for us here at High Desert? Next Sunday, I will complete seven years here at High Desert. It has been an exciting and challenging seven years. We have come a long way as a church moving from the atrium in the office building at Meadowlark to this beautiful surrounding, expanding our outreach and mission programs and growing as a congregation.

As I begin my eighth year, I have been doing some serious thinking about where God is leading us as a church. What's been working and what needs improvement? What are our strengths and what are our weaknesses? We don't have time to go into a detailed discussion, but let me share my thoughts with you on three areas.

First, we have many strengths such as the friendliness of this congregation, but one of our strongest points is our outreach and mission program. The Pantry continues to reach out to more clients each month. Through a group of dedicated volunteers and wonderful leaders, they are fulfilling Jesus' command in Matthew 25 to feed the hungry. This effort to ensure that no one goes hungry continues with our support of Pastor Joanne Landy at the Interfaith Bible Center, and the sack lunches and grocery boxes to Pastor Chris Davis in Gallup and the Navajo Nation. The lives of numerous school children are being enriched by the monthly food packages distributed by Feed New Mexico Kids. Our outreach continues through Women with Purpose, second mile giving, gift bags, Operation Christmas Child, prayer shawls and the work at St. Joseph Mission School. Now while this is one of our strengths, I still don't think we are doing enough. I truly believe that God has many other opportunities out there for us; we just need to continue to walk in faith and see what doors He will open for us in the coming year.

One area where the Spirit has been nudging me is the outreach and support to the sick, homebound and retirement communities. Our weekly worship services at MorningStar have been a blessing to its residents, and I truly appreciate all those who lead worship there each Sunday. The Church Bus is wonderful ministry and I appreciate how Jeff and Damon make sure that there is a ride for all who want to worship here. I also appreciate all those who send cards and call on those who are homebound and in the hospital. However, I know that I and the church have not done enough; there is so much more that we can do. Are there other retirement communities where we can lead worship and/or Bible studies? Are there those in the congregation who are willing to help me visit those in the hospital and homebound? Are

there those who are willing to coordinate and provide meals for those who are recovering from surgeries. With your help, these are questions that I hope to address in the coming weeks.

And last, but not least, one area that I and several others have been discussing over the past few months is our music program. When Lori informed us that she would be moving in January, we began to re-evaluate our current music program. We are truly blessed to have Aliece and Helen as our pianists. I truly believe that we have the two best pianists in the entire New Mexico Conference. However, I am convinced that if we are to grow as a church, we need to make some changes in our music program. A vibrant and enthusiastic music program is essential to the growth of any church. Please keep us in your prayers as we make decisions.

As I begin my eighth year here, I rest in the assurance and promise of two particular scripture passages. The first is our scripture text for this morning from 1 Corinthians 2:9 – “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.” And the second is Jeremiah 29:11 – “For 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.”

I hope and pray that you will join me as we step out in faith and see what doors of opportunity God will open us for us as a church in the coming year. Please pray for the church and me as we seek God’s will and see where He is leading us in our mission program, our outreach to the sick, homebound and retirement communities, and our music program. In closing, remember what the young lady said: “Keep your fork; the best is yet to come.” Amen