

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 told 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 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 responded.

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 say: ‘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 the funeral people were walking by the young woman’s 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.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:9 – “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind 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. Paul lists the human senses of sight, hearing and thought, but while these natural senses 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 have often said, 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 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 engineer and a Type A personality who likes to plan and get things done quickly, this has been a struggle for me, especially over the past six months. 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 will happen next? Our lives are filled with unknowns and uncertainties. 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, retirement, and health issues as we grow 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 Chambers does not beat around the bush; he flatly states that worry is a sin. Have you ever thought of it that way? In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:25-34 that Jana/Lisa read earlier, Jesus says a lot about worry. In verse 34 He says: "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. A man runs up to him and says: "Brother, that's what I call real faith." 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 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! There's a scene from one of the Indiana Jones movies that illustrates what God wants us to do. In this movie, Indy is searching for the silver chalice, the cup that Jesus is supposed to have used at the Lord's Supper. Indy has to cross a deep ravine where there is no bridge or way across. Now one of the clues in his treasure map says to step out in faith. So as he stands on the edge of the ravine, he closes his eyes, takes a deep breath, and steps forward.

To his surprise and relief his foot lands on an invisible bridge. In the same way 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 what have I been struggling with over the past six months? Where has God been asking me to step out in faith? What door of opportunity is God opening up to us here at High Desert? Well, when I was appointed here last year, my initial focus was on increasing attendance and stabilizing the finances. One of the ways to do this is to focus on missions and outreach. So I started looking for opportunities to serve the community. This led me to the St. Felix Pantry where I renewed my friendship with Manuel, the Executive Director; we had served together previously on a committee.

Manuel informed me that the Felician Sisters Convent next door was closing, and he suggested that we look into how receptive they were to High Desert using their beautiful sanctuary since it would no longer be used for weekly worship services. I didn't give his comment much thought at first because it was never my intent to relocate this church. But he kept bringing it up so I discussed this with our Ministry Team and in December they gave me the authority to pursue it. In January I contacted the headquarters of the Felician Sisters in Philadelphia and submitted a request to rent space from them. In February I was informed that the property was being transferred to Catholic Charities here in Albuquerque.

Since then we have been in frequent conversations with the Executive Director of Catholic Charities. Because there were many hurdles to overcome and to not raise the hopes of the congregation, these discussions were limited to John Samford, your Lay leader, Earl Hester, Chair of the Trustees, and Gordon Golson, Finance Chair. Craig Cockrell, our District Superintendent, has been kept apprised of all our discussions. I should note that our current lease here expires on September 1 and that our landlord Mark Conkling has also been kept in the loop.

The hurdles included getting approval for the Methodist Church to use a consecrated sanctuary of the Catholic Church. Through discussions and meetings in March and April on Methodist and Catholic doctrine we received approval from the Archbishop of Santa Fe with a few

requirements that are acceptable to us. Over the last few months we have been negotiating the space needed and the monthly rental rate. We have come to a tentative agreement to rent 3110 square feet which is larger and more usable than our current location for approximately \$700 less than we currently pay for space and utilities in this building. Not only will we have a beautiful sanctuary and not have to set up and take down chairs and tables each weekend, but the classrooms and choir room will be twice as large.

Last night the Ministry Team and Trustees reviewed the proposed relocation and gave approval to proceed with finalizing the lease. To give you an opportunity to review the proposed space, we have scheduled an Open House next Sunday July 28 at 12:30 pm. A Church Conference will follow with Craig Cockrell, our District Superintendent, presiding to approve pursuing a lease. Please note that there are still some issues to be resolved before this becomes final, but it was time to let you know what's happening.

In closing, let me state again that it was never my intent to relocate, but as stated in Revelation 3:8 God opened a door of opportunity for us. Throughout this process God has continued to open doors and remove hurdles. Whenever I thought it was dead in the water, God would step in and clear the way. If everything falls into place, we will become the spiritual center of a community outreach that is being created next door. The goal of Catholic Charities is to occupy the existing building with services that fulfill Jesus' command to love your neighbor. So far the proposed tenants include a center for pregnant teens and a senior daycare center operated by Presbyterian Hospital. 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. Remember keep your fork; the best is yet to come. Amen