

Road Trip Revelations (1 Samuel 3: 1-10)

Writing messages to share with all of you on Sunday mornings isn't the easiest thing for me to do. I marvel at the pastors that have blessed this church with their abilities to write sermons week after week that take scriptures I've read for years and give me a new insight on how it affects my Christian life. I believe ministers are truly inspired by the Holy Spirit to write meaningful sermons. For me, however, my inspiration comes from more secular sources. That said, today's message is brought to you courtesy of my loving wife, and my passion for motorcycling.

Sue had vacationed with a girlfriend in Arizona a few years ago, and upon returning informed me of how refreshing and relaxing the trip was. She then offered a strongly worded suggestion that we take a few weekends off during the year to get away for some rejuvenation. It was that thought that at 2:20 a.m. one morning that kept me awake and got me thinking about my past vacations—more specifically, about the motorcycle road trips I took over 40 years ago. I realized then that my motorcycling journeys paralleled the spiritual journeys of my life.

As a child I attended Sunday school where I learned all the 'basics' of Christian doctrine. Don't tell lies, don't hurt others, and don't say bad words. I

also learned the consequences of not following the rules—like saying a bad word. To this day, I still remember the taste of Ivory soap! My learning the basics of motorcycling also involved consequences, like the afternoon I tried to impress the Newburg twins (Laura and Linda) by speeding out of Freiss Lake Drive-in on my 85cc Kawasaki only to dump it at the end of the parking lot by hitting the front brake on gravel.

Both my spiritual life and my motorcycling matured as I grew older. In church, I was confirmed and later took on more responsibility by teaching the Sunday school youth. During these years I also came to appreciate and respect motorcycling as a means for me to more fully appreciate nature, and as the result made it easier for me to appreciate nature's author—our Lord and Savior. It was, and still is, hard for me to fire up the Harley and drive around the countryside without seeing a sight or smelling a smell that doesn't remind me of God's awesome creations.

Then there came a time in my life that was somewhat disruptive and confusing for me as a Christian. The person I loved and cared for most in this world betrayed my trust and walked out of my life. I prayed to God to restore the relationship, but to no avail. Then came the doubt—the anger. How could a

loving God, who up until that point in my life I felt relatively close to, let this happen? I searched for answers, but found none. I left the church for a few months, then I packed up the Harley and left on my first motorcycle trip out West with my best friend Gary.

The first few days of the trip to Yellowstone reflected the way I felt about my life in general and about God. The Dakotas and Wyoming are windy, flat states to drive through. With the exception of the Black Hills, they seemed empty and had little to offer in the way of beautiful panoramic scenery. It paralleled the way I felt about my life and my relationship with God at that time.

Uncharacteristically, I was not having the fun I expected to have riding the open road on my motorcycle. My passion for seeing beauty in nature was temporarily gone, and it bothered me.

We drove through Wyoming, drifting up into Montana and up towards Yellowstone. We entered the park and started meandering the meadows and switchbacks seeing sights that even I had to admit in my sour mood were starting to lift my spirits. At one point I glanced at my rearview mirror to see if Gary was still behind me and discovered he wasn't there.

My first thought was some kind of problem with his bike, but I backtracked about a half mile and saw his Honda on the side of the road. There he was, a few hundred feet off the road; face down on his belly in the grass drinking from a mountain stream. Excitedly he called me over wanting me to take a drink because the taste was so refreshing, but I noticed about a dozen buffalo wandering across the creek a little upstream from where we were. Thinking that they may have added something to the taste of that mountain water, so I respectfully declined—but the excitement he exuded with our surroundings at that time rubbed off a little on me. It wasn't a life-changer right there on the spot, but it definitely got me started on the road back to appreciating God's creation, and ultimately back to God.

It may seem strange to compare my passion for motorcycling to my relationship with God, but they really do go hand in hand. We all go through highs and lows—there are times we feel closer to God than others. The little detour I took from God's presence early in that trip was reflected in our ride home. We ran through a rain and sleet storm coming down the mountains. We were soaked and cold—we just kept riding to push through it. That's just the way I felt about my life at the start of the trip—even though I felt miserable, just push through it. Later that afternoon, we ran out on to a sunny plateau. The warm

winds quickly started drying us out, and the smell of the surrounding landscape that had just been soaked with rain was outstanding! What a wonderful feeling—the kind of feeling that makes you want to pump your fist up in the air and say “YES”! The kind of feeling that was starting to come back to me about my spiritual life.

Just like any worth-while thing in our lives, our relationships with God do need upkeep and maintenance. Attending church is the way most of us choose to keep our relationship with our Creator in good shape. Attending my dealership’s service center keeps my bike in good shape. Sometimes I’d like to learn more about how my bike operates, so I access the Owner’s Manual. When I want to learn more about leading a spiritual life, I access God’s owner’s manual—The Bible. If I need help figuring out what my Harley’s owner’s manual is saying, I speak to a certified technician. If I have questions on God’s owner’s manual, I speak to the minister. Now do you kind of understand the way these two entities parallel each other in my universe?

If you understand what I just said, then it will be easier for you to compare your spiritual life with your passions in life. One thing that is true is that your life will have times when you feel close to God and times when you seem to struggle.

There will be the sunny, warm, mountain meadow feelings that you will enjoy. They will invigorate you to the point where you just want to shout out at the top of your voice, “Thank you God for Life!” Then there will also be the patches of rain, sleet, and cold weather. You’ll be uncomfortable and you’ll wish for the warmth you know is out there but you just can’t find right at that moment. Just keep in mind that the warmth you seek is just around the next bend—it will come.

So, to get back to my original inspiration for this message, I did a quick self-analysis of where I stand on the idea of my spiritual road trips. The truth is I’m at peace with my life—I am at peace with my relationship with God. It does not mean that there is not a ton of room for improvements, but I am comfortable in the thought that He is present with all of us here this morning and that he is keeping an eye on all of us every minute of every day. And as we travel life’s highways, keep your eye out for an occasional mountain stream. Sample and appreciate its water without over-thinking about what could possibly be wrong with it.

Finally, don’t be shocked if God supplies a few rest areas along the way that might just provide a few heavenly surprises. It was in the summer of 1985 on a scenic overlook Estes Park, Colorado, that I truly believe God made direct contact

with me. You see, I'd been dating Sue for about a year and was pretty sure it was love, but another marriage was a HUGE step for me. I was worried because we came from two totally different worlds--she liked Mozart, attending operas, and enjoyed fine dining. I liked Roy Orbison, attending the county fair, and dining out at Arby's. I'd prayed about it many times, but seemingly got no definite reply. That evening, after my two biker buddies and I feasted on our cold baloney, potato chip, and Oreos, I went out alone for a quick ride before sunset.

I pulled over and was going to take a picture of the sunset over the valley below, when I thought to myself how nice it would be if Sue was here to enjoy it with me. I wasn't praying at the time—just thinking about her, when just behind me I noticed a beautiful double rainbow. I can't begin to tell you how that took my breath away--I literally gasped and said out loud, "Oh my God". Somehow I just knew that at this exact moment the Lord was telling me that our two lives were meant to be lived together. That moment of revelation was as intense to me as the burning bush must have been to Moses.

Finally, I believe that all of us have some secular way of experiencing God's presence in our lives. Wherever your heart is--whatever passions you may have--it is there that God is likely to reveal Himself to you. It may not be motorcycling,

but His presence can be felt in gardening, music, doing volunteer work, sitting quietly by a lake, babysitting the grandkids, or donating to worthwhile charities. The experiences might be as intense as seeing a double rainbow, or it might be as subtle as watching your best friend lying on the ground drinking from a mountain stream. Make no mistake about it; we all have our own glimpses of heaven from time to time.

In closing, I have to admit that there is one inherent flaw in comparing my two-wheeled adventures to fleeting glimpses of the hereafter. As a motorcyclist, we have a saying: “It’s not the destination, it’s the journey”. The best part of a motorcycle trip is viewing the scenery from an open-air cockpit, smelling the countryside as you motor through it, and meeting and talking with fellow bikers as you make your way across the country—it is the journey itself. However, in my spiritual journey the emphasis is definitely on my final destination. I would urge all of you to continue in whatever pursuits give you little glimpses of heaven. Enjoy the journey, and keep your eyes peeled for the rest areas God provides along the way. AMEN

PRAYER: Most merciful heavenly Father, be with all of us gathered here this morning as we journey through life to our final destination to be with you in heaven. Open our senses to all of the wonders you've put here on earth for us to enjoy, and grant us generous hearts that we can share the blessings you provide to us every day with those around us. Be with us when the road of life becomes difficult to travel, and keep alive in us the faith that as disciples of your Son there is no hardship that can keep us from Your grace. It is in the name of Jesus Christ that we offer this prayer, AMEN

This mornings' scripture gives us insight into how God attempts to communicate with us from time to time, and our abilities to recognize His attempt to speak to us. The Bible contains numerous records of God communicating with priests, prophets, and even what would be deemed ordinary people. It may be a bold, overwhelming message like the burning bush that made Moses realize immediately that it was God's voice he heard. Listening and responding is vital in a relationship with God. God does not always use the sound of a human voice, but many times uses subdued and non-verbal communication. The trick for us is to acknowledge His presence in our lives and His willingness to

give us some heavenly insights from time to time. Here now these words of scripture: (1 Samuel 3 : 1-10)