

The Park Road Pulpit

Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church

Russ and Amy Jacks Dean, Pastors

Just Letting You Know How it Turned Out

Mark 1.16-20

January 25, 2009

Amy Jacks Dean



The last time I preached was just last Sunday. It was about 10:30 pm – 1 ½ hours into a worship service in Cuba. And for the most part they stayed awake – except for the one person who snored – LOUDLY – it was a child and it was ungodly! Our team of 11 decided that we would not listen to anyone complain when we got out of here at 12:10 or even 12:15! The next to last time I preached was right here 2 weeks ago. If you were here you will remember that I veered away from my manuscript – always a dangerous adventure. I had written the sermon days before I preached it. I had practiced delivering it 4-5 times early on that Sunday morning, but it wasn't until standing in the pulpit actually preaching that sermon did I feel something begin to boil inside me. It was just one paragraph within the sermon – not even the main point, but rather a mere reference to our upcoming trip to Cuba that I thought would accentuate what I was trying to say. Here's what I said. I'll try not to launch into another tirade, but I'll tell it still makes me mad as a hornet: "2009 is going to be a tough year for everyone. We know this from CNN and the above the fold headlines of the Charlotte Observer. But this is not just about money. It's about money and jobs and retirement benefits – yes – but it's also about the emotional health and well-being of folks. I emailed Asdrubal Forte and asked him was there anything in particular that his people at Resurrection Baptist Church needed to hear. I was thinking about the sermon I would preach there. I've been twice and both times I have preached kind of the generic feel good – we are all one in Christ even across the

barriers of our differences – kind of sermon. I thought this time I should just ask him – what kind of specific Good Word do your people need to hear? He emailed me back one sentence: ‘I think my people need to hear about hope.’ After two recent devastating hurricanes in an already impoverished country, I bet they do need to hear about hope. On this trip they cannot host us in their homes for meals – which has been one of the highlights of our recent trips – because they simply cannot get their hands on enough food. Don’t worry, we will have plenty to eat because we are Americans and we will be able to access food in their country in a way that Cuban nationals cannot. How will I preach hope in the midst of that kind of injustice? I don’t know yet.” (from “All Hands On Deck, preached January 11, 2009)

And that was all it took. Something stirred in me that set me off on a tangent. I think it was the overt injustice of it. They can’t find enough meat to feed their families, yet citizens of the country that maintains an ineffective and immoral embargo against them for over 40 years will have all the food we can eat. And the pastor there thinks that the pastor here might have a word of hope?! Well, at the end of my little non-manuscripted tirade I said something like: “I don’t know how I am going to preach hope there, but I’ll tell you that I am going to do it. Because it is sin to despair, I will preach hope. Because it is my calling, I will preach hope. I’ll let you know how it turns out.”

So that’s what I am trying to do today – just letting you know how it turned out, because I did find a word of hope. The word of hope for them is the same word of hope for us, and I want to stop by the Sea of Galilee on our way to finding it. On my two week pilgrimage to the Holy Land last summer, I spent one week sitting each day on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Each day I carved out a few minutes alone on the banks of that

water. It is a place so full of sacred story and holy history that I felt overwhelmed each time I sat there. I just stared across it. I vividly remember one day praying for the people on a fishing boat out in front of me. I knew they weren't fishing for relaxing pleasure. They were fishing for their living. They were fishing to provide food for someone. How could I have known they were fishing for me? But when we went to a restaurant for lunch one day, no one took our order. They just brought us a plate of food – it was the plate of food pictured on the front of your bulletin. Not wanting to be rude, I didn't say anything, but just between you and me, I prefer to have the head removed from anything I'm about to eat. But I ate it anyway. Fish – right out of the Sea of Galilee. Perhaps the place where I sat each day for a week was the very spot where Jesus found Simon (who would later be named Peter) and Andrew fishing and Jesus called to them *follow me and I will make you fish for people*. Or perhaps it was the restaurant by the lake that was the spot where Jesus went a little farther and called James and John. He called them – I'm guessing with that same urging *follow me and I will make you fish for people* - and they left everything and followed him. This is the scene known to us as the calling of the first disciples, and I wonder, have we heard our own callings?

Some were called to leave everything and literally follow in the very steps of Jesus. But some folks still had to do the fishing so that others could eat. Some, like the father Zebedee, had to stay and mend the nets so that the people who fished could fish. But everyone had a job. Everyone had a calling. Have you heard yours?

While food, especially meat, is hard to come by for Cubans – they still hosted us with a graciousness and welcome that would just about put our southern hospitality to shame. We flew into Havana last Friday and drove to Matanzas where we stopped by the

pastor's mother-in-law's house. Asdrubal made about 3-4 trips out of that simple house to the bus. He shoved the bags that he carried into the back of the vehicle and we made our way to Veradaro where we would stay. After unloading and eating dinner, we rode the last 45 minutes of our journey to Carlos Rojas where we were greeted with many hugs and kisses and smiles that needed no translation. On Saturday we loaded a bus with members of their church to drive about a mile on a dirt road to a lake in the middle of nowhere Cuba for the baptism of two of their members. And when we returned to the parsonage right next door to the church, the cooking began. You see, the day before our young pastor had finally located some meat for us to eat – in a town about 2 hours away. It was meat that he had stuffed into our bus the day before for our Saturday night feast. No ice chest - just plastic bags full of meat. They turned their dirt courtyard, underneath the clothesline where the baptismal robes were still hanging to dry, into a banquet hall. And out back over an open fire the fish were cooking. Fish. *Follow me and I will make you fish for people.* Being there, among our extended family, is a reminder that there is nothing more important than relationships and a sense of community and belonging. I think most folks have always heard this text about the calling of the first disciples as strikingly evangelical. Follow me and I will make you get folks saved, born again, right with the Lord. But that's not what he said. *Follow me and I will make you fish for people.* It's a calling to relationship. And as I ate that fish pictured on the front of the bulletin among 22 pastors from all over the country, I felt strengthened by the sense of community that we shared. All I have to do is look at that picture and I am transported to the Sea of Galilee, and I am renewed again. And as we sat at the fish fried banquet in Cuba – simple plates and glasses that didn't match – never have I enjoyed a feast more.

We laughed until we cried. We ate until we thought we would “explode” as the English speaking Cubans would say. We fished for people, and there we enjoyed a bountiful catch.

This weekend some of our youth have participated in a 30 Hour Famine. I wonder if any of them heard a calling to give their lives to working for hunger relief. I wonder if any of them will be more generous with what they have or more compassionate for their classmates who have not. They slept outside in cardboard boxes to try and better understand the plight of what it means to be without shelter – hungry and cold. *Follow me and I will make you fish for people.* Our calling is to fish people out of lives poverty and despair. So I thought it was interesting that our church last night hosted 4 women and 10 men who would have otherwise been on the street – cold and hungry – at our Room in the Inn ministry. While on the other side of our campus 6 youth and 3 adults took on their plight for one night. *Follow me and I will make you fish for people* is our calling.

I want to conclude with the last portion of my sermon that I preached at about 11:00 **PM** last Sunday night in Cuba. Picture yourself in the simple/beautiful sanctuary – go there with me in your minds as you listen to the end of that sermon: “I have thought about the recent hurricanes that you have endured. I know that food has been hard to get, making life even harder which has made your welcome to us around your tables even more special. I know that jobs can be hard to find and medicines can be hard to get. I know that money is always a worry and illness and disease can make life stressful. I know that people often turn to alcohol and drugs to help ease their pain or to help them find some happiness. I hope that you won’t forget who you are. You are The Church. You are the People of God. And you are the best place that the people of Carlos Rojas

could hope for. I will tell you that I have seen hope in you. I wish I could say I hope you will have no more hurricanes in Cuba, but that's not Hope. Hope is knowing that there will be more hurricanes and you plant plantains in your backyard anyway. You don't sit and worry about the next storm. You make plans and live life to the fullest knowing that God will never leave you. I have seen Hope in the faces of your children and in the way you love each other. I have seen Hope in the waters of baptism. Hope is alive and well here in Cuba, and I'm taking some home with me. So don't forget who you are. You are Beloved Children of God, and in you, God has great Hope. You, Resurrection Baptist Church, can bring the kind of healing that your country needs. And I hope that Park Road Baptist Church will bring the kind of healing that our country needs. And together we will be strength for the other." (from the sermon preached in Cuba – January 18, 2008)

So, Park Road Baptist Church, I just wanted to let you know how it turned out. May it be so.