

The Park Road Pulpit
Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church
Russ and Amy Jacks Dean, Pastors

¡Buen Camino!

Numbers 6.22-27 and I Peter 4.7-11

September 13, 2009

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At a meeting of our Very Special People senior adult group several years ago, I heard a presentation by a couple who had walked all 500 miles of El Camino de Santiago – an ancient pilgrim route across northern Spain – and I returned to my office declaring that one day I was going to do that. At the time, I never dreamed I would get to experience it so soon. For almost 2 years now I have planned and looked forward to walking El Camino de Santiago – The Way of St. James. My piece of our summer sabbatical was to take care of all the arrangements for this part of our summer’s journey. I did my internet research and found a company called “Spanish Steps” that led pilgrimages. And that was it. My job done! Well, there was the coordination with the travel agent and working everything – I mean the entire summer schedule - around baseball. There was booking hotels and lining up one train and 2 buses to get to the little town of Sarria where we would begin our walking journey. So after everything was booked and paid for, the worrying could begin. You know the kind of worry I’m talking about – I wonder how much the boys will really enjoy walking 15-17 miles a day for 5 days straight; I wonder if we will get along with our fellow pilgrims in our group – will we even speak the same language; I wonder if our guide will be personable and engaging; I wonder if we’ll like the food; what if one of us gets sick; what if it turns out to be boring; what if it rains the whole time; what if one of us has a heat stroke; what if I can’t physically do it; what have I gotten us into?!

And then the morning finally arrived. We had breakfast, pulled our packs on our backs and with hiking sticks in hand, we opened the lobby doors of the hotel and started walking. The

air was actually cool, and there was a fog that hung low. We walked through the small town of Sarria, up a bunch of steps, and onto a small paved road that led up a hill alongside a cemetery and out of town, and in less than one mile into our 16-mile day, we were on a dirt path in the middle of a somewhat wooded cow pasture. We crossed a small creek. The air was just right. The smell was earthy and fresh. The beauty of the countryside was something to behold. The company couldn't be beat. And, we had already received and spoken the greeting that would be a source of energy and connection for the next 5 days - ¡*Buen Camino!* Good Way. Good Route. Good Journey. And in those two words that I had never heard or spoken before, I literally was changed. I could feel it welling up within me as we walked that second mile. Those two words were like a breath of fresh air. You'd hear their little bell ring behind you and then you'd step to the side of the path for the biker to come flying by yelling ¡*Buen Camino!* And everyone would return the greeting: *Buen Camino!* Each person you met on the trail offered and received the same blessing – *Buen Camino!* Who knows what language they spoke as their first language? Who cared? In two simple words we spoke the same language - ¡*Buen Camino!* It was a spoken blessing.

Words matter. What we say and how we say it. Do we offer blessing or curse? Do we speak hope or disappointment? Do we say what mean and mean what we say? I know there are so many times that we speak and wish that we could pull our words back in, erase them, but how often are there words that need to be spoken while we keep silent? Words hold power, and the question for us today is - are you using your power wisely and gently? Do your words include or exclude? Do your words tear down or build up? Do your words promote peace or spread gossip? Now I've stepped on some toes and done gone to meddlin,'haven't I?

Within that subculture of The Camino, I discovered that our larger culture is missing something: a simple greeting of goodwill and blessing. Not – “How you doin? Fine. How you?” In that kind of greeting we aren’t really asking how someone is doing because we don’t want to know how most folks are really doing. And they don’t really want to tell us either. We often don’t even make eye contact or wave a hand - so consumed in our own lives that we miss all kinds of opportunities to offer a spoken blessing. We certainly can’t look to our government leaders to speak words of blessing. It is an embarrassment to me – from both sides of the political aisle – how citizens of our country are speaking to one another these days. And listen to how family members speak to each other sometimes when you are in a place to eavesdrop. For some families you don’t have to eavesdrop to hear parents shouting at their children and young people being disrespectful to their parents and parents speaking hatefully to one another. And then we certainly know of scores of people who no longer go to any church because of words of condemnation and hypocrisy that have come from church leaders.

“Philo of Alexandria, an ancient Jewish philosopher, is reputed to have said, ‘Be compassionate, for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle.’ . . . How can we maintain such a mindset? On the Camino, as matters grew harder and our energy depleted, people became more inclined to help one another. As conditions worsened, compassion increased as well. We were all fighting a great battle, taking on a huge challenge, but we reminded each other that none of us was alone. Most of us live privately and individualistically, isolated and cut off from one another. Instead of front porches for visiting with neighbors and passerby, our backyard decks are sheltered behind privacy fences. We no longer stroll on sidewalks, with opportunity to chat with pedestrians, homeowners and shopkeepers; rather cars move directly into and out of garages with automatic doors. As we drive, we keep windows closed . . . and in the meantime we grow

impatient with folks who drive slowly or hesitate a second too long at stoplights. Then we do not wish a *Buen Camino!* but honk horns . . . instead . . . If small things like a shared meal [and help in carrying a backpack] and an encouraging phrase make such a difference for pilgrims [on the Camino], what monumental things could be accomplished in the twenty-first century if Christians found simple ways to greet, encourage and honor [the people that we pass on our own everyday journeys]?” (The Way is Made By Walking, pages 115-117)

I'll tell you what the world needs today. The world needs for us to *speak . . . as one speaking the very words of God*. The writer of I Peter sets lofty goals for any who would read his letter – *be hospitable without complaining, use your gifts to serve one another, serve with the strength of God and speak the very words of God*. We are in dire need of hearing words of blessing. We have the words of criticism down pat. We've got words of sarcasm and cynicism on the tips of our tongue. We know words of complaint by heart. But do we know words of blessing? *Buen Camino* filled me to overflowing, and I am determined that those words – and other words like them - will be the words that I continue to utter to people that travel the path with me. The world is desperate for our Good Words of Blessing and our Good Words of Hope and our Good Words of Peace and our Good Words of Love – desperate - I tell you. For our Good Words are not our own – they are *the very words of God*.

It occurred to me that since Michael baptized Chase and Rob today, that there was a missed opportunity for me to speak a word of blessing to them – as their pastor and their friend. Russ spoke words in his prayer of blessing, but I, too, had some words to say, because words matter.

Dear Chase,

The first words in our church's covenant with you begin "we share in your excitement today." It is true. Chase, I am truly excited for you today. You have taken that bold step to say to the world what you have heard all of your life and what you have known to be true your whole life long – that you belong to God and that Jesus is the One worth patterning your life after and following in his Way. I feel a special kinship with all things Bengel since your family is the first family that we got to know. I still have the pictures of our first Halloween in Charlotte. We hadn't moved into our house yet, so Jackson and Bennett trick-or-treated with you and Copelyn and Ala in your neighborhood since we didn't have a neighborhood yet. You were our boys' first friend, and I love the way you have been friends ever since – even though you are older than they are. I'm actually almost surprised that you aren't sick of the church by now given the amount of time and energy and commitment that your parents – both together and individually – have given to PRBC. Your mother spent hours upon hours upon hours getting us to be your pastors, often at the expense of your family time. Your father spent hours upon hours upon hours using his expertise on committees that finally led to our new Community Center – again, often at the expense of your family. And those two things are only two of the many ways that your parents have given their lives to this church. But today doesn't have anything to do with your parents except that they have been a part of Raising you Right. Chase, you have been prayed for by this very congregation since you before you were born. This church has been your family when you were in the hospital and this church has rocked you in its nursery and this church been there to rejoice in your growing up – and I do mean growing up – how can it be that you are taller than I am when it still seems like yesterday that you were in kindergarten grade? But today isn't about how much this church loves you. They've simply been a part of Raising you Right. Today is a day of great celebration - we share in your excitement today - for you have chosen to profess

your faith in front of all of us, and that is a gift that I treasure. Chase, I pray that today is both a continuation of all you have known to be true and a beginning of a new level of commitment to the God that you claim as your own through Jesus Christ. It's as if the heavens have opened up again this day and God has said, "Chase, you are my beloved son, in you I am well pleased."

Chase, I share in your excitement today – *Buen Camino!* – I wish you Good Journey, my friend.

Love, Amy

Dear Rob,

My first memories of you are you sitting front and center with your mother in this sanctuary.

Eleven o'clock worship was your only time here. I'm sure we suggested and invited/nudged and encouraged you to come to the children's Sunday School class or to the Faith Talk classes that

Russ and I led, but Sunday at 11:00 am was your only time here – always front and center - right beside your mom. And then you hit the youth group and there has hardly been a time when the

church doors have been open and you have not been here. You have become one of those

foundation pieces of the youth group and of our church. Even though you don't like to sing –

there you are with the youth choir. When you don't want to act in a musical – there you are as

stage hand. You go on all the trips. You come to every Wednesday night supper and every

Sunday night Forum. But this is what is so great about you – you are a worker and no one knows

it. It's too bad for you that your mother has chaired the Membership Care committee for more

years than is reasonable and has been the chief reception giver and party thrower around here.

Too bad for you - because you have been her right hand man in all of it. I laughed and laughed

when your mother told me that when the old kitchen was recently renovated and turned into a

conference room and the new storage supply closet that you said, "This is great. This room is so

much more convenient than the storage room upstairs." You may be about the only youth in the

church that can truly appreciate the new location of the storage closet! It simply goes to show that you have invested your life here and it has made all the difference. But all the trips and all the worship services and all the party preparations are not what it's all about. Today, Rob, you went through the water and that's really what it's all about – claiming faith as your own and giving your life to the Way of Jesus. What you did and said in baptism today is what the rest of it is all about. So welcome home, Rob, and thank you for your witness today. I wish you Godspeed – *Buen Camino!* – Good Journey, my friend. Love, Amy

Buen Camino! Everyone. What we say matters, so Good Journey! May it be so.