
Grace & Peace

Indian River Presbyterian Church

March 19, 2006

A letter from your pastor, Mike Malone...

Dear friends:

More and more I am feeling what I imagine the apostle Paul felt as he thought about various churches in Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece and even Italy...he longed to see them. He had developed an affection for them. He desired for them to grow in their understanding of the cross. He prayed for the gospel to take root in their lives and bear fruit for God's glory. But mostly, it seems, he simply longed to see them.

The transition in which Barb and I, and our daughters find ourselves in is not easy. Many of you know what it is like to move from what is familiar and comfortable to what is new and, in many respects, unknown. But in the midst of that change, my heart is more and more drawn to you...I long to see you, minister alongside you and to you, and seek, by God's grace, to watch the kingdom make its advance in Vero Beach.

This transition reminds me of one of the central themes of the Bible: we are aliens, strangers, sojourners on the way to our permanent home. But as we make our way there, we leave an imprint on the world around us. When Rome was being threatened by the barbarians from the north, the citizens of the realm began to blame the Christians. Those who had not embraced Christ and persisted in their paganism apparently thought that the ancient Roman gods were angry. The threat from the north was an indication of that anger. The Christians were the problem because they refused to worship any 'lord' other than Jesus. Augustine responded that Rome need not fear the Christian presence. In the first place, Rome could expect them to be the best of its citizens precisely because every Christian submitted to a higher authority; they were citizens of a greater, eternal realm. And the Lord of that realm commanded them to 'submit to the governing authorities because they are established by God.'

And in the second place, Christians are committed to justice, righteousness, compassion and mercy without discrimination. When the gospel begins to make its impact on a person, the realities of the kingdom begin to be seen...across all of life. The best thing that could happen to Rome is to have the gospel take root among its citizens, bringing the blessings of the kingdom to the entire realm.

There is a wonderful picture of this in Psalm 84. Give it a read. It is the story, if you will, of a band of pilgrims. The pilgrim has one great longing: to be in the sanctuary of God (v. 1). That is where blessing is; that is where life is. And notice that, as they walk the pilgrim path, they pass through a valley (v. 5-6)...valleys are places of uncertainty, even danger. This valley is called 'Baca'...literally, a place of weeping, or of bitterness. It is a metaphor of the world...this broken, ravaged, desperately needy realm where we live. But as they pass through this valley, on their way to the place they really want to be, this valley is refreshed...it becomes a place of springs, pools...an oasis in the midst of the desert. What a paradox; what an irony. The very people who have the greatest longing to be in another place are the people whose presence makes the most difference in **this** place!!!

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That is my hope, my dream, my prayer for us. That we, who long to be home, will, never-the-less, be the greatest source of refreshment and hope in Vero Beach and Indian River County.

Please continue to pray for these pilgrims who are headed your direction. Until the end of August, I will be there as often as I am able...and Barb, too. But until we are there, know that we long to be with you and undertake this great work together. Pray for a place for us to live. Pray for the sale of our home here. But more important than these things, pray for Vero Beach, for the elect whom God will gather, for the blessings of the kingdom to refresh this portion of this fallen world.

For the sake of the King,

Mike