

GOODBYE TO A VERY GREAT MAN

I ask that the majority of my readers, not from our home church, My Father's House, grant me some indulgence this week, as I share with you just a little about my pastor, teacher, mentor, friend and spiritual father, the Rev Fred Naedele. Pastor Fred graduated just after midnight on Monday, December 29, 2008. Though at the end his body may have been full of cancer, his spirit was always full of the joy of the Lord.

THE MEASURE OF THE MAN

“And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done...He trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that after him was none like him...For he held fast to the Lord, he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments”. (2Kings 18:3, 5, 6)

Mere words cannot capture the essence or sum up the character of the man so many have come to know as Pastor Fred. He is somehow bigger and yet more intimate than other men; - displaying more ‘presence’ yet always so self-effacing; - and more filled with love than anyone I’ve ever known. I’ve known good men who labored quietly in service of their families, - doing good in the eyes of the world. I’ve brushed elbows with the respected and the accomplished. Men of this sort have done ‘great things’ and the world applauded their efforts. Some have made millions in their seemingly effortless pursuit of wealth for the sake of wealth itself. The ends of those efforts prove empty. Ultimately, they have missed the point. God has even granted me the privilege of having both a father and a father in law who were exceedingly loved by all that knew them. Yet of all that I have made acquaintance both great and small, Pastor Fred Naedele of My Father’s House in the small Buffalo suburb of Elma, NY, - is the only truly ‘Great Man’ I’ve ever known.

Fred’s greatness was that of a man who knew the reality of God and had the confidence that he was walking in His purposes. These are not just words, - I know this for a fact. Fred had over the course of his life, set aside his own agenda. He was working for the Lord. And it showed in every word and thought and deed. Fred took the notion Christ-likeness seriously. His was the uncompromising voice of a prophet, declaring the Law. And his was the heart of a servant, cleaning and fixing and attending to details that men 20 years his junior would have found taxing and others half as accomplished would have balked at as beneath their station. My wife Cindie recalls that on one of our first visits to the Church, she found Fred, having just preached the sermon, - in the lobby, vacuuming up a spill. That kind everyday humility helped breed some of those same servant-like qualities in those that he disciplined.

Yet there was nothing phony about the man. What you saw was real, - and you got all of that reality when you got Fred. Through it all you saw him love. He believed in people. He nurtured them; - encouraged their strengths and helped them address their weaknesses. You could hear him greeting folks in the sanctuary before a Sunday service: “Hello beautiful person!” or “Hello wonderful person!”. And there was nothing remotely plastic about any of that. He was deadly serious. He loved people. Even the unlovable! I recall a time at a men’s retreat. There had been a story in the news about a man that had been caught molesting children. And indignation was in the air. As we went around the circle we were saddened and sickened and prayed for the children. Then Fred spoke and changed the outlook of the session. He prayed for the perpetrator. He was lost too. And he needed Jesus. There was – (perhaps a shamed) – silence. And we prayed for his healing. So it was we who were changed.

For many he displayed God's love on a deeply personal level. To my wife, - and to others, - he offered himself as a father when she had lost hers. She and others took that offer quite seriously. Fred, too, took seriously the words of Matthew 28:19-20. **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you”**. He founded My Father's House with the expressed purpose of serving as a base for missions to places like India. It was there that he led crusades that saw thousands come to a saving knowledge of the Lord. While there he told me he saw “healings of all sorts, MS, cancers, the deaf hearing, the blind seeing, fingers growing back on lepers, wombs opened. There were so many,” He shook his head at the wonder of it all.

Now though he remained the pastor of just a small church on a back road in the suburb of a struggling city, - his influence spread across the globe. He was the spiritual dad to churches in India and founder of a hospital there. He was the chief mentor of the man responsible for a growing Christian movement in Bangladesh that has seen hundreds of thousands give their hearts to Jesus despite economic and physical persecution. He has been called to minister in Africa and Mexico, and to speak at forums of some of the most respected and well-known Christian leaders. Some have called him ‘apostle’. Yet through it all he remained the guy that would climb up and fix the roof when it was needed and that would meet with us at 6am on a Wednesday morning because it was the only time a couple of us could fit it in our schedules. I will surely miss that time.

To Fred it was all about ‘making disciples’. That’s what he did. This small church in Elma became home to international ministries that reached out to Viet Nam veterans, and Jews looking to come to Israel. It has a hand in changing the agricultural system of Ethiopia, offering salvation in the package. It is home to a biker ministry that reaches that very hard to reach population. Fred has trained up budding leaders that have gone out and set up their own churches – 110 in all, - on three continents. Even this humble End Times newsletter was his idea. This was Fred; - always teaching, and guiding, encouraging and praying, - always loving. He planted and he watered and harvested, all the while believing God for the biggest return; - the hundredfold. His mission was spreading the Kingdom of God, and in the process spreading **“righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost”**. He stood firmly for that righteousness, proudly going to jail in his fight for life and against the hideous practice of abortion. He did so with joy. And his sermons oozed that joy, - sometimes infused with side-splitting humor, - sometimes cutting to the center of the soul. He shared all of this with a humility that was very real indeed, awed as he was by his Creator and Savior. He was fond of saying something like this: ‘The more I study and learn about God, the less I find I know about Him’. Despite the undeniable truth of that statement, by the way he lived, I’ll bet he knew more than he let on.

To the end, he was ever a lover;- of his congregation, his friends, his family, his precious wife Donna, - and exceeding all, - his Savior Jesus Christ. Just days before he passed, Pastor Fred broke into a sermon in the hospital where he awaited the call of that Savior. He was praising God, and lifting Him up, and excited about all that God Is and all that He was doing. So it was typical of Fred to offer up this deep theological thought: “Hooray for Jesus!”. And we all concur and offer a hearty Amen. You see by any measure, he met the criteria. He lived and loved for His God to the fullest of his ability, - trusting the Lord to make up the gaps. He served the only purpose worth serving: The Very God of the Universe; - The Alpha and The Omega. He strived to love Him with all his heart, soul and strength. And in the process he became... a very great man indeed! My wife Cindie summed it up when we got news of his passing. “He was the closest thing to Jesus I’ve ever known.” We who remain are privileged to have lived in the presence of such a great servant of the Lord. Alleluia!!!