

## **A FATHER'S TREASURE CHEST**

**Father's Day -- June 19, 2011**

**Matthew 6: 19-21**

**The Church of the Covenant**

I am the energizer bunny of pastors. I keep going and going...I was way overcommitted and doing 3,000 things simultaneously. I was in the middle of a building campaign at the church I was serving. I was completing my doctoral dissertation; I had to do a radical rewrite of my thesis five times between January and the April 15<sup>th</sup> deadline. I was the only pastor at a growing, pastorally demanding church. My family went away on a special trip together that spring and I almost felt that something was "up" –it was almost too quiet, too good. It was as if the Spirit whispered –enjoy it now for soon all will be ZANI-ness. My Dad went into the doctor's office and the dreaded word was spoken – "cancer". "You have cancer, Mr. Broberg." When one person in a family is diagnosed with cancer the whole family "has" cancer. We were about to emerge into a season of endless doctor visits, tests, stress, pain, tears, and prayer...

One word spoken and life would not be the same again...That was 1990 and I remember it all so vividly it is almost as if it were yesterday. The energizer bunny stopped going and going; was stopped in his tracks.

In growing up my Dad and I sort of had a mono-syllabic relationship. Through the high school years we sort of grunted at one another. "Uh" meant please pass the potatoes. "Uh-Uh" meant cut the grass. When I didn't cut the grass "Uh-Uh-Uh" meant you better cut the grass now if you know what's good for you." There was nothing wrong with the relationship. I figured somewhere behind all that grunting my Dad loved me. And while I would never admit it publicly I loved my Dad, too. I always suspected that this was the way his Dad had related to him in growing up; the model of the father passed to the son, and so-on and so-forth, world without end. Amen.

Years later, when I entered seminary I mysteriously discovered a mutual respect and deep-seated love for my Father. It is sort of like Mark Twain's remark that he was amazed when he came back from college how much his Father had learned. But the mono-syllabic grunts had now turned into entire sentences –albeit SHORT sentences. He would articulate "I love you" over the phone *first* sometimes. We would hug and not in that formal guy to guy with multiple pats on the back kind of hug but with a genuineness and warmth that speaks volumes. I have said and will always say: "I got called into ministry and received my Father in the bargain." God is good all the time; all the time God is good.

But I was outraged and shaking my fist at God when I learned my Dad had cancer. Being a pastor I am supposed to know everything and to be calm, cool and collected no matter what insanity is raging around me but I was so angry at God I could spit. I remember praying: "Give the cancer to me not to my Dad; I can take it; don't hurt my Dad." I remember the stark realization that while I had thought everything I had done, all the hours I had put in, all the sacrifices I had made in ministry, was for the glory of God that

when push came to shove I thought I had earned a free pass where pain in my family was concerned. As if because I was a minister my family would always be safe from the dreaded word –cancer. The energizer bunny ran out of juice.

I put on a piece of paper my daily prayer during that time and placed it in front of the picture of my Mother and Father on my dresser in my bedroom: it was both a confession of faith that no evil could take my Dad and also a little “in your face” to the Good Lord. It said: *“Lord, you have given me back my Father; only you can take my Father away; no cancer can; no evil can; only You can, Lord.”* It was this sense that I had been given my Father as a gift, that our relationship had been so formal for so many years, and now that the Lord had given a depth and a love to it, now only the Lord could take that away. Every day for two years I prayed that prayer. The Good Lord can take; but cancer cannot take.

20 years later my Dad is still with us. Through many dangers, toils and snares we have already come; tis grace has brought us safe thus far and grace will lead us home. And every day is a gift of grace from God; every day is a gift; life is a gift; our loved ones are a gift; there is no gift, no treasure more precious in this life than those we love and those who love us.

So my Dad is about to go into surgery. The day before I wrote down all my thoughts in a torrent of words that poured forth from my pen. I wrote it down on an old legal pad I have. Word after word I wrote ; “I have not been a good son but you have been a great father; I have been disappointing to you in so many ways but I have always been proud of you, always loved you; I want you to live so we can have the time to be Father and Son. I love you, Dad. Stuart” I go to the hospital room and give it to my Father and he reads it. In typical fashion we do not speak about it; not then, not ever. I think he said “thank you” but that is about all. He comes through surgery just fine. He goes through the long road of recovery. No comment on my letter; no acknowledgement of its content. But I did not want my Dad to face all that without knowing how I felt about him; all the conversations that did not happen I did not want him to go into the next life not knowing what he meant to me.

So it is now a couple of years later, after he has recovered and is fine. Our relationship is better, sweeter, and deeper than ever. It is a gift from God.

You know how men all have that little box that holds all their cufflinks and old discarded keys and rings we no longer wear and fraternity pins we haven’t put on in years? I don’t know why but I think we all have one. It is sort of a record of our life, all the accumulation of old stuff we cherish. In an odd way we would never throw it away; they are all representative of all of the treasures of our life. To be sure it is a rat’s nest. But women, don’t touch it or try to straighten it up or for heaven sakes don’t try to throw its contents out. This is our treasure chest. These are all the little sacred treasures of our lives.

So I ask my Dad if I can borrow a pair of his old cufflinks. I go to his little treasure chest sitting on the dresser in the master bedroom. I lift up the top part of the chest that holds rings and other things to expose the secret compartment underneath. And there it is --A folded up piece of old yellow legal paper. The letter I wrote him in the hospital --A priceless treasure in my Father's treasure chest. And then and there I knew how much it meant to him...how much my words meant to him...how much I mean to him...

Sometimes you have to watch what someone does instead of listening to their words in order to figure out what they are trying to tell you with their life.

*Life is short.* There is no day like today to say the things that weigh upon our heart. *Life is short.* Life is precious. Our loved ones are all gifts from the hand of God. There is no time like today to take out a piece of paper and to pour out your heart to those you love. *Life is short.* Perhaps your Father has already passed on to the next life. It is still not too late to take out a piece a paper and to write to him all the things you hold in your heart. It is never too late to say or to write: "I love you."

Place all these things in our treasure chest; place all these things in our heart. For as Jesus says: "*Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.*" (Matthew 6: 19-21)

Because there is one word that cancels out the dreaded word "cancer". That word is LOVE. "There is no fear in love --for perfect love casteth out fear." Eternal love trumps cancer every time.

Amen.

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**IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!**