

“Spontaneous and Amazing” – Andy Wing, 6.28.09

I remember when I was a small child. I saw the neighborhood children riding their bicycles through my yard, on the streets around my house and I wanted to do it too. I wanted to participate.

So, my dad bought a bike for me. We started out slow. He would jog beside me and hold me up and I would peddle. And then, so that I would learn, he would let go of the bike. Inevitably for some reason known only to little Andy, I would realize that my dad wasn't holding me up anymore. I would panic, stop peddling, and fall down. My dad would say, Andy you had it! Why did you stop peddling?

Well in this story, Peter had it! He saw the power of God in Jesus and badly wanted to participate in the work of Jesus. He has seen Jesus perform miracles. He has been confused, confounded, and amazed at Jesus' teaching. He has seen Jesus feed the five thousand. You see, Peter recognizes that Jesus is doing things only God can do and Peter burns to participate. And now, he sees Jesus walking on water and says, “Lord, if it is you command me to come to you on the water.” Jesus said “Come on” Come out to me.

YES! Peter got out of the boat because he saw something so attractive in Jesus. But how to be a part of it? So he stepped out and started walking on the water. But then he looked down and he thought about the storm, the wind, and the waves. He became afraid. He stopped. He thought. I'm only Peter. I can't walk on water. He sank and cried out “Lord, Save Me.” Peter stopped peddling.

Feel for Peter here. He wants to participate in what Jesus is doing. But, the wind and waves are mighty persuasive. And I can hear in the words of Jesus “You of little faith. Why did you doubt?”...Peter you had it! You had it! Why did you stop?

A friend shared a story with me recently about a little girl who went to the zoo with her family. They went to the place where the elephants were and the zoo was letting the children sit on the elephant and ride on its back. The children shrieked with joy as they could feel the power of the elephant underneath them. The little girl clapped her hands as she watched her brothers and sisters enjoy being on top of the elephant. But when it came her turn to ride, she turned it down. Suzie don't you want to ride? Her face turned down and she said no. She couldn't bring herself to get on the elephant. It was too scary. So they left the zoo. And all the way home she cried because she did not ride the elephant even though she wanted to. She was afraid of the very thing she wanted the most. Have there been times in your life when you have seen things that God is doing in the world and gotten excited about them? Perhaps excited about a special Christian speaker you heard! And you think, I could never do that. Maybe you can think of other ways when you have seen God acting in the world around you and you have pulled back. I think it happens to all of us. I think that's a little of what Peter is going through.

Peter badly wanted to be a disciple. And we badly want to be disciples. We want to participate in the power of God. But, instead of focusing on the power of God, we see our own inadequacies and we stop peddling.

I tutored each day at the United Methodist Children's home across the street from my seminary in Atlanta. The children's home is home for children who have been removed from the custody of drug addicted or abusive parents. Most of the children have serious psychological problems and are medicated. I felt overwhelmed sometimes. I felt so inadequate. Many of them would not talk to me or let me help them with their homework. Many of them just lashed out at me and distracted the ones who wanted tutoring help. I felt overwhelmed because I do know that mad and bad equals sad and I do not know how I can be involved in their healing. I want to

reach out, but often I feel overwhelmed. One of my favorite children left the home after my second year of Seminary. She was the sweetest little girl when I tutored or played with her. But she would go into a rage and throw objects when she got out of control. Before she left, she made me promise that I would not give up on them and leave. Because she said, "Everyone leaves!"

There are days when I just sat quietly not knowing what to say or do. In some ways, those were the easiest days because I forgot about the hard lives these children have. But in another way, those were the hardest days because those were the days when I felt like I was not trying anymore. When their reality didn't seem like reality to me. And those were the days when I sank because I forgot that God is working in the lives of those children. I would take my eyes off the children to eye the time clock. I stopped looking for what Jesus Christ was doing in the lives of the children because I was afraid I was not really doing anything in their lives. So, I can relate to Peter. We want to participate in what God is doing, but aren't we also afraid to participate?

I hear Jesus in this passage saying "Don't be afraid!" You almost had it. Jesus demonstrates his power as God over the sea when he walks on water. And Jesus demonstrates his power over our world today. (our storms) God is at work in the lives of these children at the children's home. I saw how excited they got to light candles or set up communion in the chapel. I saw them hug each other extra tight sometimes. One little girl pulled...no I saw her nearly drag the chaplain's assistant into another room during communion to say, "Tell me what are we doing?" (in communion) because she was experiencing something of God and wanted to hear an explanation of what she was going through. It turns out God is doing a lot of work at the children's home. There is much to participate in.

God is at work in congregations like this one. And God is at work in the world.

Are you familiar with the story of the racism and terrible inhumanity the government of South Africa imposed on the Black South Africans? The violence done to Blacks in that country is no longer allowed and the perpetrators are being brought to justice. But the anger and sadness over the atrocities still remain.

But listen to what has happened in people's hearts. A man named Bishop Desmond Tutu, an amazing man, testifies to the power of God amidst the storms of racial hatred. When Nelson Mandela was newly elected as president, he appointed Bishop Tutu, a clergyman rather than a judge, to look into the brutal stories of South Africa's apartheid. The president sensed that the problems that South Africa had and would continue to have were deeply spiritual problems. The Reparation would need to be spiritual. And it has been. Tutu was present at a hearing for four officers who had been responsible for some soldiers opening fire on a crowd and killing 28 people. The first officer to speak was arrogant. He was not a bit sorry. In fact he was proud of himself; saying, "the lives lost were worth nothing. He riled the crowd up with his pompous speech. It was very tense. And then another one of the four stood up. And with tears in his eyes, he turned to the audience and said, "Please forgive us, please. The burden of the Bisho massacre will be on our shoulders for the rest of our lives...Would you please receive my colleagues back into the community?" It was so unbelievable, so unexpected and Tutu could feel the presence of grace in the crowd. The crowd of disfigured people; people who had lost their children and had been hurt by this man stood up and applauded. It was spontaneous and amazing.

God's work is spontaneous and amazing. God is Lord over the storms. God is master over our storms. God is at work in our world. It was not easy for Tutu to participate all of those

years speaking out against apartheid; having people hate him. But, he is very eager to participate in what God is doing in South Africa. Though the task is overwhelming we have seen wonderful things happen in the world. We too will participate daily in what God is doing in the world. We will ride our bikes.