

7-20-25

The Fly in the Ointment

Mark 1: 1 – 15

Well, we made it back from Canada, and we had a wonderful trip – all eight of us. The Six Kings and Sydney's two best friends, Caitlyn and Makenzie. Needless to say, our vehicle was packed, and every morning started out pretty much in the same manner, with me reorganizing and repacking our vehicle.

A shout out to Howard's Auto. They prepped our car for the 4000-mile journey, and we had no problems except for a low tire pressure warning **on day one** which was easily fixed because Darrell lent us his battery-operated air pump. You're the best Darrell – we love you and your hardware store!

A shout out also goes to Dave Amstutz and Lance Swanson for filling the pulpit in my absence and teaching and encouraging the flock. You guys are the best.

John Divo also deserves mention since he broke out his handyman skills box to fix a couple things in the parsonage.

Of course, there are many more of you fine folks who faithfully work behind the scenes in varied capacities to keep FCC shining the light of Christ in our little community. Your efforts do not go unnoticed.

On our trip, we visited places like Ontario where we stopped to visit Mackenzie's family's Florida camping friends.

Quebec where I had the chance to practice my French: Retardez, Arrêtez! And ou est le W.C.? adroit, agauche! Merci Beaucoup.

Nova Scotia where we went whale watching, but the whales didn't get the memo that the Kings were out looking for them!

We passed through New Brunswick in hopes of seeing a moose, but the big critters were nowhere to be seen.

We did however, visit a cemetery where we saw and cleaned up the tombstone of my mother's great, great Grandfather who was a teacher of the violin, logger and farmer.

We walked along the shores of the Bay of Fundy which is supposed to have the highest tides in the world.

We parasailed in New Hampshire.

Hiked an ancient volcanic flume in Maine that had an impressive waterfall inside steep canyon walls.

Visited the Canadian side of the Niagara Falls.

Toured a coal mine in the same town where John Taegle's mother lived as a little girl before moving to Detroit.

Visited a potato museum.

In New York, we stopped at Seneca Falls, the birthplace of the Women's Suffrage movement and where "It's a Wonderful Life" was filmed."

Whew! Just saying all that was tiring. Imagine doing it all!

And I didn't even mention the fact that we went to Prince Edward Island, the setting for Anne of Green Gables and the childhood home of the author.

The interesting thing about this is that it wasn't even her parents' home that inspired the novel but her cousin's place that she visited often. We toured the house and walked down lover's lane which was appropriate for Julie and I since we celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary on the trip.

Perhaps you've read the book or have seen the television series that originally aired way back in the eighties – my daughters really get a kick out of it, and we've watched it several times.

And there's one particular scene that sticks in my mind when I think of Anne Shirley. It's the time when Anne's teacher visits Green Gables to encourage Anne to apply for a teaching position. Anne just graduated from high school with exceptionally high marks. Anyway – and there is a point to all this background stuff – Anne is about to serve dessert to her guest.

So, she goes into the pantry to get the bread pudding and discovers a dead mouse floating on top of the intended dessert!

Well, imagine how shocking this must have been!

But Anne remains surprisingly calm and silent as she proceeds to serve up three helpings anyway and then returns to the table.

No one is the wiser and suspects nothing out of the ordinary, but just as her beloved teacher reaches out to scoop out her first spoonful, Anne dramatically shouts ... “stop!”

She then quickly explains the reason for her outburst.

Well, Anne and her guests had a good laugh when all is revealed, but this was the quintessential fly – in- the ointment scenario.

Everything was going along so perfectly until that uninvited guest showed up and ruined the dessert.

You know this is exactly how we often feel about Jesus?

He is sometimes viewed as the uninvited guest - the fly in the ointment. A lot of times he's viewed as the obstacle to all our well-thought-out plans and schemes.

He's sometimes viewed as the object that makes you say to yourself ... If God weren't in the picture and if I weren't a confessing Christian, I'd be doing this and this and this right now and having a lot more fun in life. But no, I can't do that because Jesus wouldn't approve.

Notice, I'm **not** talking about non-believers here. I'm talking about you and me – professing Christians who sometimes feel like God is not being very cooperative with us – He's not understanding us and not letting us do what really want to do. He's not playing by our rules, and this can be so annoying.

Have you ever felt like this?

It's like God has the TV remote and He won't share! He won't let you and me watch what we want to watch!

I've felt this way plenty of times and when I do, I easily get angry and resentful, and this condition is not good and nor healthy.

This feeling happens a lot among non-Christians too – especially non-Christians. Jesus and the Bible are viewed as the fly in the ointment - the uninvited guest.

Think about it for a second: If you're living a relatively happy go lucky life – and I'm not saying everything is perfect – you still have the typical challenges like everybody else like not enough time to relax and not enough money in the bank to pay the bills and maybe your job isn't as satisfying and rewarding as you'd like it to be, but other than that, life is good, do you really want someone like Jesus crashing your party and telling you to repent and believe the Good News?

If you're anything like me, you just kind of want to be left alone so you can do your own thing. But then Jesus comes along – and just before Him, John the Baptist comes on the scene and they start saying crazy things like *“repent and be baptized”* and *“I baptize with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit”* and *“The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Good News!”*

You want to experience the air getting sucked out of a room? Bring up the topic of Jesus and Christianity. People will go dead silent. They don't want to talk about religion and Jesus and being called to something that may challenge the way they want to live.

Why is it this way?

I think a lot of it has to do with the fear of the unknown and being comfortable and familiar with the known. Most of us can't wrap our head around the idea that Jesus will call us to change – change our minds, our attitudes, our priorities.

Even the prospect of and consideration of changing in order to align ourselves with God's will is a radical idea that most people haven't the stomach for.

So, let's not read our Bible and let's not pray less Christ reveals something to us or in us that we can no longer ignore.

We've all heard the saying ... ignorance is bliss. And maybe the flip side of this coin is the saying truth is very inconvenient because it can upset the apple cart. I don't know about you, but I don't want my apple cart upset.

So, in very real and tangible way, John the Baptist and more importantly Jesus are the flies in the ointment, the uninvited guests.

Maybe this is what the Apostle John meant when he wrote in John 1:10, *"He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."*

These verses describe the exact situation that so much of the world's population is in right now. He came to them, but they do not recognize him, and they do not receive him because they cannot bring themselves to betray their long-time friend, the darkness.

John elaborates his point in chapter 3:19, *"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light."*

So, Jesus, why did you have to come and mess up my party?

I like being my own man and being an island. Why do I have to be part of a faith community? They're so dull and so serious. Why can't they just lighten up? (I'm thinking out loud here. Tell me if I'm striking a chord.)

Lord, don't inconvenience me. I march to my own drummer. I can't be slowed down by the fruits of the spirit like love and kindness and self-control. Okay, I'll love my immediate family, but don't make me love those other people who really annoy me.

I'm over-committed already with other well-meaning activities like showing off my classic restored car and my golf league, the Lions Club and my snow-birding and grandkids schedule. I'll go to church on Sunday when I'm in town, but I don't have time to check in on that widow who lives two doors down. I don't have time to make snacks for coffee hour. This would cut into my time I set aside to get my lottery tickets.

Listen, I'm not trying to send anyone on a guilt trip. That's the Holy Spirit's job. My job is to tell you that if you view Jesus as the fly in the ointment, the dead mouse that ruined your dessert, then you're not ready to be a Christian and follow God.

You haven't come to the point in your life where you see God's gift of grace, salvation and eternal life in a brighter light than you see the temporary trinkets of this world.

And this is okay because God doesn't want insincere half-hearted Christians who are just following him because they may get a free meal now and again.

God wants followers who see His Son as He really is. Not the fly in the ointment, but as the Apostle Paul writes in Colossians 1: *"The image of the invisible God, the first born over all creation, He who created all things, the head of the church, the first born from among the dead, For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Him and through Him reconcile to himself all things, whether things on*

earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”

One final word. Don't leave here this morning beating yourself up because you don't see Jesus this way and you don't feel the love for him as you think you ought to have.

God is a loving and understanding and compassionate and forgiving. And tomorrow when the sun comes up it will be your sign of these truths and that He is giving you another chance to get to know him personally and intimately through the reading of his word and praying and pouring your heart out to him, and fellowshiping with other Christians.

Loving God and his Son is a process just like it is a process to love another human being. It takes time and effort and investment. But we don't do it on our own strength. God gives us the Holy Spirit to help us on this exciting adventure.

And when you fail at it and find yourself believing that God is more of an irritant than a blessing, remember the oyster and how it makes the priceless pearl.

Jesus said to Simon and his brother Andrew, *come and follow me and I'll make you fishers of men*. They left behind all that was familiar to them, but it doesn't mean they forsook their earthly father or loved him any less. It just meant that their world was about to expand in exponential proportions, in ways they could never imagine, and their hearts were going to be filled to overflowing with God, His purposes, and his love for all human beings.

We're all called to a greater party, a greater celebration, a greater purpose than this world has to offer. Let us not shy away from the unknown. Let us know Him and his ways better. Amen.