



Christian Choice!

by Mark Brunner

Intertwined Roots! (Ephesians 3:17-18)

I was watching a cloud of midges ascend within a shaft of autumn sunlight over our front deck yesterday evening. Their energy seemed endless as they simply flitted about for nearly an hour until the sunlight faded as did their twilight performance. As I watched closely I noticed something rather peculiar about the column of 50 or so insects. There was an actual rotation going on within the column, almost as if I were watching a flock of geese pass overhead, one bird changing up with another. It seemed that their tireless flitting had everything to do with the draft created by the group and not just individual effort. Despite the rising air around them, they held place simply due to an internal draft of their own.

When pressed by others because of what we believe, does it help to be supported by others who believe as we do?

Here's a story: The Inside Passage of Alaska has the highest annual rainfall averages in the country and gets up to 220 inches of rain annually! With winds up to 41 miles per hour or higher during these periods, erosion is a significant factor! Let's imagine for a moment that you're a tree. The soil in most coastal areas is only two to six inches deep. Not much for even ideal climates, but combine this with heavy precipitation and strong winds, and one can only wonder how trees can survive in such hostile environments. What's the secret

to their success? Their root systems are intertwined with one another. The more roots a tree has that are intertwined with other trees, the more the tree can resist the challenges of the weather. The weather does not phase them because there is confidence and strength in unity. (Selected)

The same is true for us. Only by being intertwined by faith with our families and friends, with fellow believers, can we stand tall and face the storms of persecution. We can't make it on our own! When we are persecuted for doing what's right, we need to learn to depend on our fellow believers so that we can face the challenges of life with a smile. Persecution for Christ's sake is a learning opportunity! Instead of bringing us down, they can lift us higher and higher in our dependence upon the One who can calm turbulent waters! Are you on the verge of being uprooted? Get intertwined with your fellow believers. Get involved in a fellowship of believers. Together you can be victorious!

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34)

Rising Above The Dirt! (1 Corinthians 15:57)

Like anyone else, persecution isn't something I look forward to. It leaves me with a creepy feeling on the back of my neck. Recently I was walking down the street near my office and I spotted a group of teens standing on the street corner. They were cursing and I debated whether or not I should risk their ire and call them on it. I did. I walked up to the group and asked them to please refrain from using God's name that way. They burst out laughing, looked at each other and cursed all the more in my direction. I walked away with the hairs on the back of my neck bristling. I felt creepy, almost like crawling into a hole. But, in a moment, I shook it off and vowed I would do the same thing the next time anyway.

It's never easy to stand up when others push us down and bury us with their looks or words. Is there any comfort?

Here's a story: A man had a donkey. One day, the donkey fell into an old abandoned well. Its owner finally noticed it was missing and went to the neighbors and enlisted their help. They searched everywhere. It was then that one of the men looked down into the well and saw the donkey. Unable to lift the animal out, one man suggested that they fill the well in with dirt so as to prevent the same tragedy from befalling others. Although they felt bad, the men took turns shoveling the dirt. Once the first shovel of dirt hit the donkey, the animal found renewed energy. It brayed loudly. Then it happened. The donkey realized that the dirt was a gift. With each scoop of dirt that fell into the well, the donkey shook off any that landed on it and then took a step up onto the top of the pile of dirt forming at the bottom of the well. The men kept shoveling; certain that they were burying the poor donkey. After much shoveling, the men were quite surprised to see the donkey, looking right straight at them. It was standing on top of all that dirt that had been dropped on it. (Al Batt)

If you've ever suffered persecution because of your faith, think about that donkey. The more dirt they tossed on him, the more he climbed above the dirt. When we're willing to do what's right, we can expect to be persecuted. In fact, the Bible tells us that we WILL be persecuted. But, we will only need to endure the name calling for a short time. Like that don- key, with each shovel full of dirt, we can put a smile on our face. The more dirt they throw, the taller we stand.

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Come Out From The Trees! (James 4:7)

I own a Corvair. For those of you who aren't familiar with Corvairs, it's a rear-engine car manufactured by General Motors about 40 years ago. I'm proud of my car and even have a Corvair jacket with a 'Vair patch on the front and "Milwaukee Corvair Club" emblazoned prominently on the back of the jacket. When I first got the jacket years ago I really liked looking at it but seldom wore it. I guess I was sensitive to the fact that it labeled me so boldly. It's not that the jacket was ugly. It was just a little too apparent for me to wear it often.

As Christians we often shrink back when it comes to being labeled as Christians. Maybe it's time to put that aside?

Here's a story from Jimmy Brown: I spend about an hour each morning making my way down the trail that surrounds a lake. On this day I was just really aware of how blessed I am and I wanted to praise the Lord! Only, they were watching; the people living around the lake. I'd look silly; perhaps strange or crazy. Then, I saw my answer – a grove of trees. I walked quickly to the trees and then realized just how crazy my thinking was. Why was I embarrassed to speak the Name of the One who saved me, the One who blesses me beyond measure? Why hide my affection for Christ! I decided that I would wait until I came out from behind those trees to speak His name. And when I drew out in open view, I let out what my heart had wanted to say to my Savior. And I just praised the Lord with voice and hands! (Jimmy Brown)

Satan wants us silent. He wants to stifle our praise; but not only that, he wants to stifle our witness. He wants to stifle our voices from speaking up for Christ. He wants us to keep our affection for Christ to ourselves. "It's for church, not the community. It's for the worship service, not the workplace. It's for the sanctuary, not the softball field. It's for the Bible class rooms, not the court rooms", he says. What will people say if we speak up for Christ? What will people think if we stand up for His kingdom? Perhaps it's time to be more concerned with what God thinks than what others think. Stand up. Speak up. Wear His Name proud. Like that old Corvair jacket, if it says what you are, perhaps it's time to come out from behind the trees and wear it with pride. It may be very apparent, but then, so is God's love for us.

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Lion Tamer! (Philippians 4:13)

Like most of you, there have been things in my life that I'm often hesitant to do. For some it's public speaking; and others it might be taking a test or entering a talent contest. For me it's always been a hesitancy to fix things. I'm always concerned that my repair jobs might not measure up. Measuring up to

someone else's standard is the reason most of us might be hesitant to attempt the new or the untested. Fear of failure often motivates us not to be motivated at all. But, when it comes to standing up for what is right, how can we allow ourselves to be hesitant?

Here's a story: A first grade teacher seated her students in a circle. She asked them what they wanted to be when they grew up. One by one, each child got up and announced, "I'd like to be a nurse like my mother," or "I want to be a banker like my father," or "I want to be a teacher like you, Miss Smith." The last child to speak was the most shy and timid little boy in the class. He said, "When I get big, I'm going to be a lion tamer in the circus. I'm going to face those animals with my whip and chair and make them leap through hoops of fire and obey all of my commands." Seeing the disbelieving looks on their faces that he could ever act so boldly or bravely, he was quick to reassure them. He stood up again and boldly stated: "Well, of course, I couldn't do it all alone. I'll have my mother with me." (Alan Smith)

How like that little boy we are sometimes. We are sometimes shy and timid about standing up for Christ in the midst of an immoral society. We keep quiet when we ought to speak up. Yet, deep down inside each of us is that spark of courage that causes us to stand up and make a statement about our faith instead of cowering when we ought to take a stand. Where do we get the inner strength to be bold and brave? In a sense it's like that little boy's confidence in his mom. Only, instead of our mom, it's through the assurance that we have Christ by our side. The Bible tells us that we ". . . can do all things through Christ who strengthens (us)." (Phil. 4:13). With that knowledge, take courage today to do something for God that you've been hesitant to do. Often taming the "lions" in our lives is nothing more than making sure that there is an honest-to-goodness, trained lion tamer standing next to us all the time. And, when you think about it, there is!

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More Than Conquerors! (Romans 8:37)

My grandfather always said, “Don’t stare at shadows or you liable to miss the flea!” The advice was probably wasted on a young, often intimidated thirteen year old. I knew then that it had something to do with not making your problems bigger than they are. But, after intervening decades, I know now how true he was. Not only do small problems cast a big shadow; but all problems have the same thing in common—those shadows can move-in on you if you study them too long. Sometimes it’s best to swallow hard and be the first one to make the move.

Here’s a story: The early morning was so peaceful . . . The sky was clear, the air smelled clean, and the early birds’ songs shrilled across the rain washed yard. Then I saw them. The pair of crows being chased off into the east by a pair of birds about a third their size. I don’t know what kind the smaller birds were, but it wasn't the first time I had seen such a sight. I paused for a moment, marveling at how those tiny birds could so successfully chase off birds so much larger than them- selves! As I watched, the crows disappear into the horizon and the smaller pair circled back. As they quietly made their way to their tree, I could sense God’s voice, speaking to me through the birds. My Bible tells me that in ALL things I am MORE than a conqueror through Christ who loves me (Rom. 8:37). That means that with Christ on my side, I can conqueror ALL things! Even things that loom up four times as big as me. Even things that everyone says cannot be beaten. In Christ I am MORE than a conqueror in ALL things!
(Lyn Chaffert)

Like raucous and intimidating crows, life’s problems and challenges often leave us cowering at the feet of our problems! But cowering isn’t a fitting response for someone who is MORE than a conqueror in ALL things, is it? Instead, we would do well to take some lessons from that pair of tiny birds! Every time a “Crow” flies into our lives, we can simply chase it away in the name of Jesus! Never forget this truth, my friend! In Christ, you are MORE than a conqueror in ALL things! So the next time that pair of crows tries to invade your nest, stand up in the name of Jesus and chase them off! They WILL flee! But, you may have to be the one to make the first move.

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