

Remembering, Believing, and Seeing

My father died at the age of 49. He was the general manager of a farmer's cooperative in a small Iowa town at the time of his death.

My dad never had the opportunity to go to college. But he was a voracious reader, particularly of theology. In the last years of his life he was considering a career change. He had a strong desire to go to seminary and become a pastor, which would have required completing college first.

I have had opportunities my father never had. I went to college. I did a year of seminary after college. I graduated from law school. I have literally traveled around the world.

For all these reasons and many more it was especially significant for me when I passed my classical exam last month to be a commissioned pastor in the Christian Reformed Church.

A "commissioned pastor" has many of the same responsibilities and privileges as a "minister of the Word." But in the case of a "commissioned pastor," ordination is tied to a particular position. In my case it is tied at present to my continuing work with Resonate.

What my Dad did not see

I wish my dad could have lived to see what I have seen.

I am not one who thinks that all things good were in the past. In fact, I wonder sometimes if to think that way is actually unbelief.

I happen to believe that God really is still very much about keeping his promises. My Bible tells me that those promises include renewing his fallen creation and creating for himself a new people in the image of his Son Jesus.

And, I continue to see evidence that what I believe in my heart resonates with down-to-earth reality. How can we as the church learn to see where and how God is working and discern where we might join the Spirit? How do we find the "Lydia's" among the people with whom we rub shoulders each day? (See my January-February prayer letter "Finding Lydia.")



Joel's Dad

Is God at work here?

These are some of the places I have been in the last couple of months and some of the questions my visits have prompted:

- Philippines: Jeannie and I were in the Philippines in February. We spent most of our time at the Asian Theological Seminary in Manila where Resonate missionary Stan Kruis teaches. The mission of Asian Theological Seminary is to "prepare leaders who will effect Biblical transformation in the Church and societies in Asia and beyond." One of the high points of the visit was lunch with students from a dozen other countries outside of the Philippines. One student came from as far away as Nigeria. Stan and his wife Bessie serve as chaplains to these students. In today's globalized world missionaries like Stan and Bessie often have an influence that goes far beyond the country where they live. How might God be using the mobility of people today to raise a new generation of leaders with a broad vision of what God is doing in the world?
- Japan: From the Philippines Jeannie and I went to Japan. A highlight of our visit was supper with a pastor in the Reformed Church of Japan, his wife, and his adult daughter. The Japanese culture is often known for being insular – rejecting outside influences and hesitant to mix with people from other cultures. As is the case in North America, the church in Japan all too often reflects its culture more than the Gospel. But this pastor and his family were counter-cultural! They not only had a vision for cross-cultural mission, they had led

short-term mission teams of Japanese young people to other countries. They told stories about how the young people had been changed by what they had seen and done in other cultures. How might God be using our contact with people from other cultures to open our eyes to differences between the values of the Kingdom and the values of our own culture, whether that be North American or Japanese culture?



Riding Rapid Transit in Tokyo, Japan

- Honduras. In March I spent several days in Honduras. Many of the Christian Reformed Churches in the municipality of Manguilile in Honduras have started "impact clubs." The impact clubs engage elementary age children of the community in learning Christian values and new skills and also challenge them to do service projects in their own communities. The rapid expansion of impact clubs in this area of Honduras is being led by high school students who are serving as mentors to the younger children. The person who gives overall leadership to the program is herself a young adult. How might God be prompting us to trust the leadership the Spirit is already nurturing in the next generation?

What do you see God doing in your church and community?

-Joel and Jeannie

PRAISE:

- For safety in a lot of travel these past couple of months: Philippines, Japan, Honduras, and a couple of times to Grand Rapids. For signs of the Spirit's work in each of these places.
- For Joel passing the classical evaluation and being approved as a commissioned pastor in the CRCNA in his position with Resonate.

PRAYER:

- For the strategy evaluation of Resonate's work in Haiti in which Joel will participate at the end of this month.
- For the many women whose life Jeannie touches as she teaches English as a Second Language and counsels.
- For the three-year certification in Spiritual Direction that Jeannie and I will be starting later this month.

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