

VISITING A PLACE FROM MY PAST

I turned 62 this past Thursday. I was wished a happy 40th birthday on Thursday by a close friend of my daughter. I have been positioning myself over the past few years to be the pastor selected to officiate at her wedding. I wonder if her favorable comment about my age on Thursday was her way of getting a friendly discount for officiating her wedding one day.

I decided on my birthday to take the day off. I hope none of my parishioners are reading this because Thursday is typically a workday for me. I spent the morning doing a few chores outside that I don't always get a chance to do. Even though my family was planning to take me out for supper, I decided that I would treat myself to lunch. I went to a restaurant that I used to go to almost every day for a period of time to enjoy coffee and toast while I worked. I had not been in this restaurant for nearly five years, but it still holds wonderful memories in my heart.

When I entered, the waitress recognized me immediately despite how long it had been since I last ate there. I guess the couple of grey hairs I have acquired over the last few years did not make me look too different. The waitress came over to my table right away and we spent the first few minutes just catching up. She wanted to hear more about my wife and daughter than about me. I naturally ordered a coffee but wondered if it would taste as good as I remembered. I was not disappointed from my first sip.

I treated myself to a hamburger on my birthday with "all the works" and when it came to my table, a smiley face had been placed on top in mustard. When I went to the front to pay my bill, the owner came out and we reminisced together for at least five minutes. I am glad that I treated myself on my birthday by returning to a place I still hold so many fond memories from in my heart.

We all have places from our pasts that we may not have revisited for quite some time. Some of these places may not hold positive memories for us which might be the reason we have not returned. There may be some places though that we would love to visit again. This restaurant was placed in my life by God for a purpose and a season. I would go in almost every weekday morning to have coffee and toast while I worked at sermons and Bible studies. I would take my mother there on Friday mornings before groceries, and my daughter there on Saturdays as part of our daddy-daughter outings. Some congregation members would even join me there for brunch after a Sunday service.

The reason why God put me there for a season was so I could reflect His presence and love toward so many people I was privileged to meet there. During my years there I was asked to do the funerals for some of the staff and customers. One time I even did a memorial service in the restaurant itself. People would come over to my table some days and share some of the struggles and challenges they were dealing with and ask for prayer. One individual even started coming back to church after getting to know me there.

As much as my presence hopefully blessed them, God blessed me as well through all the wonderful people I came to know. Tim Hortons seems to be where God has me now to continue this kind of ministry for Him. My visit on Thursday to my old stomping ground served as a reminder to me of God's love, faithfulness, and guidance over my life and that of others.

We all need a place to return to at times where we can be reminded of God's guidance, direction, and care. For Joshua and the Israelites, they were to return to a place at the Jordan River where a memorial was built using 12 stones gathered from where they crossed over into the Promised Land. When people returned to this spot and asked what the stones meant, this was what God told Joshua: **They remind us that the Jordan River stopped flowing when the Ark of the Lords' Covenant went across. These stones will stand as a memorial among the people of Israel forever (Joshua 4: 7).**

God wanted this place on the banks of the Jordan to serve as a reminder to the Israelites of His guidance and care over their lives. Just like the Israelites had this place, and I have my old restaurant, we all may have a location that we can revisit at times to be reminded of God's wonderful guidance over our lives. **Where might this place be?** It might be returning to a church that holds fond memories from the past. It might be a spot where God felt very present. It might even be a place in nature where God's presence was strong. If a place is not coming to mind right away, pray and ask God to reveal it. When He reminds us of these places, and prompts us to return, let's not hesitate to do so. Hopefully each one of us will be as uplifted as I was on Thursday.

In case you are wondering where to get a good tasting burger and a great cup of coffee feel free to reach out. I know a place.

Keep safe and God bless,

Pastor Dean