

CRIBBS NOTE – MAY 6, 2007

“I am glad to be here,” is a phrase that has new meaning for me. Usually, it is a statement given at the beginning of a speech. We hear it from friends after traveling a distance to visit us. But, today, it means quite literally how blessed I am to be here alive.

A few years ago while traveling in Nigeria, the vehicle in which I was riding was struck head on by another vehicle on a two-lane highway the locals refer to as “Blood Alley.” The head-on collision was sudden and terrifying. I was not wearing a seat belt. My body flopped forward as my head crashed into the windshield. In an instant, life seemed too brief and final. A few days later while worshipping with our international partners at a Presbyterian Church, Ghana, congregation, I spoke those words with a depth of sincerity unknown within my soul until then, “I am glad to be here.” It was absolutely true.

Today, I speak those words again. Last Sunday I left worship in haste to attend the 90th birthday party of a dear and wonderful friend in San Diego. The evening before, I had gassed up my car to avoid any delays. The trip was planned to allow some time for traffic and an on time arrival. There is always a possibility unexpected events can occur to make the best laid plans go awry. Such was the case. Just as I drove across the San Juan Capistrano City Limit on Interstate 5, traveling in the number one lane, the fast lane, I felt a slight bump and my car began handling differently. I looked to my left and then through the rear view mirror. There was no on-coming traffic. I moved to the right toward the far shoulder. As I slowed down there was a strange sound and the drive became rough to handle. I put on my flashers just as the steering wheel became difficult to control. Ahead, about a half-mile was an exit. I saw two gas stations.

Unfortunately, we no longer have service stations readily available. On a Sunday, service bays are closed and mechanics have the day off. As I drove into the nearest gas station, I stopped, got out, walked around my car, and discovered my rear passenger tire had blown out. It was shredded. It had a blow out while driving in the fast lane on Interstate 5.

The big event was more than an hour away. I had 75 minutes to get there on time to give the opening prayer and make comments.

God works in mysterious ways! Indeed. A quick change of the tire to a small spare and off to a brand name tire store. No lines. No wait. A new tire was purchased and installed. I was back on the freeway and heading to the party. Forty five minutes behind schedule. Upon arrival, late, I said with all truthfulness and gratitude, “I am glad to be here.”

Throughout the ordeal, I thought about the deaths of David Halberstam, the great Pulitzer Prize winning American journalist, who died that week in an automobile accident in the Bay Area, and St. Louis Cardinal Baseball pitcher Josh Hancock who was killed earlier Sunday morning in a car crash. Then, there I was with a blown tire on I-5. My mind raced. With every breath I offered prayers of thanksgiving and appreciation. Truly, I am glad to be here.

Life is precious and fragile. It is not to be taken for granted. Life is not inward or selfish. We are connected to others. Our existence is based on our relationships. It is important for us to share ourselves and our resources generously and unselfishly. God’s gift to all of us is the presence of others.

At our best, we love, forgive, and share. We are glad to be with each other. If you haven’t done so lately, take some time and give yourself away to someone who needs to hear from you. When you meet, you may want to say, “I am glad to be here.”