

A REDWOOD HAS FALLEN

Our great friend, long time church member, Sunday School teacher and Deacon, David Messick has now passed into the full manifested presence of our Lord. I know of no man who went more bravely and Christ-like into the glory than David.

As I wondered what was I going to say in this open letter to Christchurch, I recalled and related to what David said of the death of his best friend Jonathan, when he, along with his father Saul, died in battle. II Samuel 1:19, 25, 27: "The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen! How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!" Accompanying this thought was that David Messick, comparatively speaking, was a spiritual redwood. And it is only natural that this outdoorsman, who loved God's creation, should be compared to a redwood.

Journalist, Ryan Curran White asked rangers from the National Park Service, what happens when a giant redwood falls? Keep in mind, one fallen redwood was estimated to weigh eight tons. White said, "Some Douglas firs and California bay laurels certainly have succumbed to the stormy winter weather. But what happens when a coast redwood—the tallest living thing on the planet—comes crashing down?" Mia Monroe with the National Park Service said, "One thing I learned very early at Muir Woods is that what we often think of as a crisis in the forest is actually an amazing opportunity—either for additional light to reach the forest floor—or for trees to assume a new position as a log on the forest floor, [becoming] amazing time-release fertilizer as it slowly decomposes. It can take centuries for a redwood to fully decompose, all while serving as a 'condominium of life.' The new window in the forest canopy admits all-nourishing sunlight for surrounding trees, and the fallen log opens new homes for wildlife (including lichen, insects, and more), expanding the forest food chain and bolstering biodiversity. When a tree falls into a stream, like Redwood Creek, it also serves a key purpose in providing a safe habitat for aquatic species. It slows down the torrents of water that come down in a storm, and when it slows down the water, the gravel deposits—and that's what the fish need to spawn. It also...forms quieter backwaters where fish and other critters can take refuge, and creates deep pools that baby fish need to grow in." So when visitors approach Monroe to express their sadness for the fallen redwood trees, Monroe reassures them that their new station—across the forest floor—is actually something to celebrate. Monroe said, "They don't really die...because they're just taking a new position in life."

With these thoughts in mind consider:

1. DAVID DID NOT DIE.

Jesus said in John 11:26a: "And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die...." On this subject skeptics mock us and deny this truth. The atheists would like to think that when we die, "we are dead like Rover; dead all over." Nothing could be further from the truth. We all must live somewhere

forever. Although we are often ridiculed with our “pie in the sky” theology, they cannot deny the peace that accompanies our death or the peace of the loved ones standing by the bedside. We have experienced what the Scripture informs us, “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints” (Psalm 116:15). Like a giant redwood, his memory will fertilize the spiritual growth of many of the youth in our church who sat beneath his teaching.

2. DAVID LEFT A LEGACY OF LOVE.

For nearly half a century David and Cindy have been married. Their love has been a wonderful example of a Christian marriage. In the last days of Dave’s life on earth, he was consumed with making sure his wife was taken care of. When Dave’s frail body was not permitting him to do as much as he wanted, Cindy was alarmed when she discovered her dying husband was out in the yard digging a rather deep ditch. She was so concerned that she called his doctor and the doctor said, “Let him do this if he can.” Dave sensing his wife’s concern said, “Cindy, if this is not fixed, it is going to cause you trouble later. I can do this.” And he did. David was multilingual in the proverbial languages of love. One of his strongest love languages was his incredible hard work ethic. David worked hard for the people he loved. When finances were strapped in the Messick’s early marriage, David worked extra hard to allow his wife to stay home and homeschool their kids.

2. DAVID WAS A HOLY MAN.

One of the great blessings of our church was to have the Messicks teach our middle school children. Junior High is a very formative time of our lives, when major decisions are in their embryonic stage. It is vital that a holy man be before our youth. And this is what our boys had in David, a very holy man. His character was impeccable. Even lost people in the business world that David worked in are coming forward confirming that throughout all of Houston, Star Appliance, the business that David started and worked in, has the finest and most honest reputation of its kind in the city.

Those who are close to Dave, know that in the Messick’s spacious back yard there is a place that David went to every day of his life to perform his “prayer walk.” This is a man who had an abiding friendship with Christ! On one of his last prayer walks, David discovered a large Copperhead snake. And although weak, he went for his hoe and declared to the snake, “Not in my garden!” and with that, he beheaded the highly poisonous creature. This is a perfect symbolism of David’s dedicated and consecrated life. That old serpent, the Devil had no part in Dave’s personal garden.

3. DAVID KEPT HIS SENSE OF HUMOR.

In the last couple of visits, I found myself laughing through my tears as Dave and Cindy were telling me experiences they were sharing together. Near the end, the lights in his room were being turned off and the blinds lowered and Dave said, “Yep, turn out the lights; the party’s over.” Dave was having a hard time expressing his thoughts one day and he could see the frustration on the

faces of those surrounding his bed and with a coy smile he said, "Listen, a dying man cannot always think straight." My favorite story is when it appeared that Dave was about to go into eternity, and for a moment he may actually have stepped into the very edge. He was even telling Cindy goodbye, while lifting his arms toward Heaven. Then in exasperation he said, "Cindy, I am so sorry; this may be a long ordeal."

4. DAVID'S LIFE WAS AN ECHO OF CALVARY.

Luke 23:34a: "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do..." Dave insisted that Cindy call her brother one day and said, "I must talk to him." When she got her brother on the line, he said, "If I have done anything to offend you, if there is anything between us, I just want you to know...", " then Dave stopped and said, "Wait a minute, there is nothing between us. I guess I just wanted to call and say, goodbye." David and I for the past over three decades have gone through some painful experiences together. And there are some hurtful experiences that Dave and Cindy have had to bear alone. Never once has David gossiped or criticized those who hurt him. In Christ-like love, he turned the other cheek. Once when I was going through the greatest trial of my ministry, the Messicks approached me and said, "Pastor, we know what you have gone through and we just wanted to say, we appreciate the fact that you have never taken your personal pain to the pulpit." The truth is, I was tempted to do so, and I might have done so, but for the encouragement of my loyal friend. His life was truly an echo from Calvary. He forgave.

5. DAVID HAS CLEARED A PATH FOR OTHERS TO FOLLOW.

I have often referred to Dave Messick as the resident "Daniel Boone" of our church. He was a masculine role model of Christian manhood. He would take our boys on unforgettable hikes in the woods. He was never in a hurry; he would stop and explain what was going on in the smallest plant to the tallest tree, from the tiniest insect to the soaring eagle. Dave was always bragging on the Lord, our Creator and our Redeemer. So for the boys who still have their David Messick walking sticks that Brother Messick insisted you take with you into the forest, save it. Although it may not be like the rod that Moses carried, please remember the man who taught you how to part the waters of life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Yesterday one of the last passages I shared with David was Isaiah 43:2: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." And God was with my friend as the waters parted and David stepped on the other side.

I love David Messick. And from one Jonathan to another David, I share these words, "Then Jonathan said to David, To morrow is the new moon: and thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty" (1 Samuel 20:18).

-Pastor Pope-