

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Invest Where It Counts

by Dan Trygg

“Therefore, I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me. For everything is futile (vanity, ‘a breath’) and a pursuit of the wind. ¹⁸ I hated all my work at which I labored under the sun because I must leave it to the person who comes after me. ¹⁹ And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will take over all my work that I labored at skillfully under the sun. This too is futile.”

Ecclesiastes 2:17-19

“Don't worry about your life, what you will eat; or about the body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food and... clothing... ²⁹ Don't keep striving for what you should eat and what you should drink, and don't be anxious. ³⁰ For the unbelieving world eagerly seeks all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ But seek His kingdom, and these things will be provided for you... ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Luke 12:15-23,29-31,34

“Come, everyone who is thirsty, come to the waters; and you without money, come, buy, and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost! ² Why do you spend money on what is not food, and your wages on what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and you will enjoy the choicest of foods. ³ Pay attention and come to Me; listen, so that you will live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you...”

Isaiah 55:1-3

I have been living through an “anniversary year”. Fifty years ago, God did a number of things in my life to direct me toward Him, and set me on an entirely different trajectory in my life. I have been trying to mentally relive and reflect on some of those events, ...both to honor God, and to refresh the wonder of seeing His hand at work in my life history. Even as I am writing this, I am seeing new things, ...recognizing how different my life could have been, if things had unfolded differently..., but appreciating even more that God was stripping away things that could have kept me tied to a past history that would have been counterproductive for what He wanted to do with me.

The other day, I went up to Cook, MN to revisit some of the places of my family's past, ...and especially to revisit the farm I was at fifty years ago. My daughter, her husband, and their daughter came along, both to help with the driving, and to take in some of the family history. I had kind of worked through much of it in my mind, ...but actually going to those locations, looking over the land, and telling the stories made it more real for me.

We drove through downtown Cook. So much has changed, but many of the same buildings have remained, just different businesses. We turned the corner to My grandmother's house (my mom's mom). It was just one block off main street. I had spent a lot of time there, as a child. My wife and I honeymooned at Grandma Sara's house in 1977. The house caught fire and burned in the 1980's, however. There is only an empty lot there, now, ...purchased by the neighbor. I pointed out some other places of interest, ...my uncle's café, now an auto parts store, ...the town library, and the movie theater. The Congregational Church my grandmother had started is no longer there. We had lunch in a little café that used to be a Gambles department store. And then we set off to visit farmsteads!

There were four farms, and a cemetery to visit. Three of the farms were homesteads that had been owned, developed and worked by different ancestors. I had been to each of them as a child, and though I had not been to any of them in the past fifty years, I had no problem remembering the way to each of them. The first two we visited went back to my mother's grandparent's generation. To help my six-year-old granddaughter understand what we were about to see, I pointed out the woods on both sides of the road as we neared the Bloomquist farm (my mother's grandparents on her mom's side). Suddenly, we came out into the open, and on the right side of the road was a very large open field. I explained how grandpa Andrew and his sons had had to cut down all the trees, grub out the stumps, remove rocks and level the ground. They had done it all by hand, with horses to help with the heavy pulling. The barn is still standing, along with the house and the garage. At one time, that little house held ten children, along with mom and dad. Grandpa Bloomquist was a preacher and traveling evangelist, ...so a lot of the work around the farm was done by the boys. I am sure that the dream was that this homestead would be passed down the family, but as the kids grew up, they moved away, and started lives of their own. One of my great-uncles lived there, but he became an alcoholic, and never married. After he died, the youngest son came back from a career with the marines. He retired on the farm, but had a stroke. A lady from town used to care for him, and when he died, he willed the farm to her!

We drove to the end of the farm, and turned right, and went down a few farms to the Winchell farm (my mom's grandparents on her dad's side). Again, you could plainly see where the land had been cleared from the surrounding woods. I had been deer hunting on that farm fifty-two years ago. I remember that, at that time, the farm house roof had partially caved in, and there was a tree growing through the roof. In his time, grandpa Winchell had been a master farmer, and had won prizes for some of his horticultural developments. The farmhouse was gone, now. But the old barn was still standing. The Winchell's had two children, my grandpa Jim, and my great-aunt Hazel. There was an undeveloped 40-acre plot in the southeast corner of the farm. That was referred to as “Hazel's corner”, because she

had lived there for a time. There was an awful house fire, and her husband and four children perished in the fire. She moved to Alaska, and never returned. The Winchell farm was inherited by my uncle, but he always said that Hazel's corner was supposed to go to my siblings and I. He married late in life, and later died of a heart attack, also in 1971. Since nothing was written down, the farm was passed along to the wife's family, and out of our family line.

Then, we drove back through Cook to the northern side of town, where the Trygg homestead was located, just across from the cemetery. I remember being in that house, as a small boy. The Trygg's also had ten children, seven sons and three daughters. When the boys got bigger, they built a log cabin, just through the woods to the west of the house, where the "boys" lived. Again, the land was cleared and made ready for crops. Most of the work was done by hand. In time, everybody grew up and moved on. Eventually grandpa and grandma Trygg sold the farm and moved in with one of the daughters. At one point, my dad came into possession of the cabin that had been built in the woods. After a couple of years, however, we just realized that it wasn't practical to keep, so he sold it off to a neighbor.

We then spent some time at the Cook cemetery, finding the graves of the people we had been talking about. So many of them were laid to rest right there, including my mom and dad, and my brother.

Then we drove to the farm God had sent me to fifty years ago. My cousin and his wife still live there. That farm was not a homestead. It had been homesteaded by someone else, and my uncle had purchased it from them. He, however, was very industrious, and developed and expanded it to become a decent sized dairy farm. They had had 70 cows to milk, when I was there, plus calves and some bulls. They had pigs and chickens, as well. I was surprised to find out that my cousin got rid of all the animals in 1992. He realized that all those years of just scraping by meant that he had not established hardly any earnings in Social Security. So, he sold all the animals, and some outlying fields, and went to work as a carpenter for twenty years. They rent out their fields to neighboring farmers to hay, and they have been remodeling various portions of the barn and buildings, turning them into almost a museum of old memorabilia. It was amazing to go from room to room, each with a different theme, and see what had become of the places I had worked. It was very strange, but very creative, and well done.

We had coffee, afterwards, and I was able to tell my cousin how God had come to me in the night in February and had told me to come to the farm, in 1971. He had never known that part of the story. I was able to share with them the impact that their family had on me, during my stay. They were a family that knew Jesus personally, and was part of a church that taught from the scriptures. I had never heard anyone talk to Jesus like He was right there, until that first night on the farm. I had never heard a sermon taught directly from the Bible, until I went to church with them. Part of our daily routine on the farm was a time set aside for Bible study, prayer and personal devotions. I had never been with other people who lived that way, until I came there. It was life-changing, and prepared me for what would happen in July of that year. God placed me there to prepare me for my next encounter with Him.

As I reflected on the history of those farms, I was struck by the incredible amount of work it took to clear the land, and work it. These families all had invested untold hours of back-breaking labor to turn forest into farmland. None of them had "made it big" as a farmer, but they were able to raise their families there. For all that work, and out of all those children, none ended up wanting to continue what their fathers had started. Virtually all of them moved away to pursue other careers in other places. The dreams these pioneers had as young homesteaders, about "having their own land", and what they intended to build for their families, proved to be elusive, at best, ...and what was valuable to them had little value to their children. Or, at least their children had *other* dreams, ...dreams that did not include a farm! And, then, in two of those families, the property passed into the hands of "outsiders". It sounds very much like the concerns of Solomon, in the book of Ecclesiastes. Interestingly, his son decimated all that he had accomplished in just a few years. Vanity of vanities, ...we can work very hard to come up with nothing that lasts.

There was a high price for the hard work. Some of these fathers were harsh and abusive. There was anger, broken relationships, rebellion and unforgiveness. Their drive to succeed drove a wedge in their relationships, and eventually drove the children away. It didn't have to be that way, but in some of these relationships, that is how it was. I experienced some of that kind of harshness growing up. How different my experience might have been, if I had worked on a farm like that! Praise God that He placed me in a household that loved God and each other. I saw and experienced a different kind of camaraderie and positive interaction that made hard work into teamwork, ...where every person's efforts were valued and affirmed. That was a positive experience of farm life, and a good reason why my cousin has remained there. The farm was a *good* place, ...not a place to want to escape from!

Finally, the most powerful lesson was the realization that we can invest our lives and energy for things that are going to wear out, rot, burn or be lost, ...or we can invest our lives in things that are good, things that are going to truly bring joy, satisfaction and blessing that will go far *beyond* our own lives. We can make a difference in the life of another person that will change the trajectory of their entire future. The result of that change is the fruit of our investment in them. Just as God used that time on the farm fifty years ago to expose me to things I did not know, and had not seen, ...God can use you to do the same thing in the life of someone else. Invest where it counts.