

THREE AMIGOS...

headed into the desert east of Fallon, Nevada. There's always the unexpected in our trips like this and this trip was no different from others. We passed a stream of "Burning Man" participants also heading into the desert.

Now I can assure you that our desert experience was going to be quite different from theirs. Bright colored vehicles and props as if right out of the sixties; tiki lamps, bikes with weird ribbons woven between the spokes, hula hoops, statues of bodies...just plain weirdness! Lots of laughs.

Our vehicle, a 4x4 diesel truck, with lift and camper shell, loaded with guns and ammo, camera equipment, camo gear, cooking equipment, and three AMIGOS excited to hang out together enjoying the presence of each others diversity and the excitement, the anticipation of how God would show up on this trip.

Burning Man participants...Three Amigos; Sons of the Most High! All heading into the desert. The Spirit of the Living God started to stir within me. The first thought was Diversity of Gods Creation. The second was the desert experiences in our lives; literally and metaphorically. Third the "Burning Man Statues"; the many idols in our lives...took me to Elijah, 1 Kings 18-20, the Mt Carmel experience followed by fear and running into the desert and wanting to die...followed by the gentle whisper of the Lords voice. Lets unpack these thoughts.

Diversity in Gods Creation.

We should celebrate Diversity in God's creation but not in the world's context of tolerance for sinful desire. This is a Beautiful word capturing the beauty of god's creation from the white sands of Carmel to the fog rolling over the SF hill tops and golden gate bridge to the Napa vineyards in the fall to the desert east of Fallon Nevada and three Amigos; Sons of the Most High riding into the desert, very different in every way but connected by the mystery of the Spirit of God...and they were in the upper room, of one accord...a Fisherman, Tax Collector, Doctor....but of one mind.

Our trip was not all about the hunt, the getting it done and mission accomplished. It's the hanging together, enjoying the diversity of the three, different but then not so different.

If we just focus in life on the differences and what's in it for me then we are stuck; locked in the vortex of ourselves and headed for a course of destruction; the Dark Soul of the Night. (Discussion and self-evaluation). What are your relationships like in community and family?

Gazing into the evening sky, there is a stirring of the heart, that we were created for something much more, something that moves the heart, stirs it at a level that words can't describe. (John Eldridge speaks of this in his books). Ah struck at His beauty, his wonder, his grace, his mercy, his power, his strength, His sacrifice for us, his incredible love for us! He created all things before us to show his glory and to bring us excitement and pleasure. Don't you think the Trinity gets a kick out of watching three Amigos go into the desert to play?

So what do you do with that "stirring" within you that calls out "you were created for so much more"? Jesus said "the kingdom of god is here, now. (Thoughts on this?) I'm now 61. Some of you are older some younger. Are you looking ahead with white knuckles gripping life and a list of "have to, ought to, got to" approach to your life? If so, life is going to be dark,

painful, and fearfully ugly. I dare say many would look at the church today and say why would I sign up for that? Or we can approach life with “what’s next papa”?

Back to the three Amigos.

Jeff plans weeks ahead putting a great trip together...packing supplies for his personal use to supplying the “stuff” for community sharing. Just about everything a man needs; absent a port potty or the ladies might sign up LOL. From cooking supplies and basic utensils to extra backpacks, camo gear and the rest supplied by Safeway and the local drive-through cappuccino stop. Brian, another well organized anal☺. I wouldn’t want it differently; he’s a DC. Right? Very organized, everything laid out, packed just right. Sidebar. Even his BMW motorcycle has special “metal tool boxes” as I call them for saddles. I just don’t get it. Saddles should be “leather” and the pipes rrrumble like a Harley. Tom, packing (that consists of throwing everything into a duffle bag) two hours before trip, stopping at Peets for cappuccino enroute to Jeff’s for a quick repack into his vehicle and we are off to the desert.

Diversity is definitely in the Amigo creation. And the Father said, “Let Us create man in Our image”. In Psalms “I knit you together in your mothers womb, you are fearfully and wonderfully made”. Oh brothers how we darken our lives at times from what God created us to be. Even within the Christian community, we forget who we truly are in Christ. Sons and Daughters of the Most High! Different yes but of one mind, one Spirit.

Back to the Amigos.

Different yes but no. Forgetting self, we plunge into the present, tending to and honoring the diversity of the other. Enjoying seeing the heart jump with excitement and lingering as one Amigo chases rabbits with his 380 walther making a lot of noise! Watching another (yep Jeff) camo out and head into the blistering hot desert and prone himself out for 4 plus hours waiting for the “prize” antelope to appear and the Lord honoring our brother. And then watching as he skins out with hunters persision the antelope in the blistering heat. And the other Amigo set up his camera (Brian) holding school with teaching Jeff the basics as the two with tripods shot timed footage of the Milky Way for 4 plus hours to yield 10 seconds of video.

The evening sky turned into an array of beauty and spectacular display of stars twinkling, planets suspended in timeless display, falling stars that actually are just being seen but really burned out a long time ago. Meteors entering the atmosphere, one that had a fireball that caused the two Amigos to dance with excitement and hollering that woke up the desert and me to catch its beauty!

When life is lived from the heart, the list of have to ought to got to slips away. The Amigos are of one mind enjoying each other’s company; suspended in time by God’s Spirit of the kingdom is here now! Forgetting that our stuff is all thrown into the rear seat of the truck helter skelter, we are of one spirit, lost in the moment of engaging in the life of each other. What happened with organization, structure, the have to, ought to, got to, get it together? We were created for something much more and it resonates from the heart.

The Desert.

Speaking literally, the desert alerts my senses. Extreme heat affects my body in different ways. Cooler in the morning, windy at different times blowing sand or debris, dry scorched weather. A single budded flower growing out of a pile of cow dung. The smell of sage with

every breath rings in a wild antelope back strap cooking on the grill with a glass of syrah; spicy and maybe a chocolate finish lingering on the palate (how's that for imagination). The sun sets and the desert takes on a whole new design as if in a blink, our Creator appeared and spoke a whole new night creation. The temperature drops and the wind moves from south to north. In the distant the barren mountains with jagged points create a black cutout in the sky as they reach into the heavens which now showcases all the heavenly stars and planets. As the sunset drops the stars began to appear. Coyotes yelp and cry in the distance. The sunset with its various shades of pink, orange and red; a cloud or two highlighting the colors. Stillness in the air. Time is suspended.

Metaphorically speaking, we all have had to some degree or other the desert journey, wilderness experience; whether a physical one of cancer, divorce, breakups, job loss....the list is endless and the journey painful. And yet, there's a calling of the heart back to the Father. He calls our name...

What's that like for you? Do you see God in it, permitting, allowing you to journey into the desert of....? Do you linger, or just want to get out of it? Do you seek the Lord in your desert?

As I watched Brian and Jeff with cameras I thought about the lenses of their cameras and of course the lenses they use will determine to a great extent the type and quality of the picture. It's the same with us. Our outcome is greatly determined/influenced by what lenses we are looking through to view our circumstances in life (discussion). Do we allow our circumstances to define us or do we rise above them?

Our stories are no different than those in sacred scripture. That's the beauty of God's word. Every time I read a story or passage, the Spirit of God reveals a new refreshing truth about life, about Himself, about my relationship with Him and others. It's breathing, it's alive.

Take a look at Elijah, the prophet 1 Kings 18-20. After calling upon God on Mt Carmel and the Lord receiving Elijah's sacrifice, he commands Israel to kill all of the prophets of Baal chapter 18.

Then in chapter 19:1, Elijah receives a message from Jezebel, the queen " May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them", speaking of the prophets of Baal.

Verse 3, Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. What happened to the Mt. Carmel experience; the mountain top yahoo of experiencing the incredible power and glory of God. Anyone identifying yet with Elijah's story. There's more. Verse 4, "while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die." "I have had enough, Lord, Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors". "Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep". Sounds like despair, weariness, to the point of depression and wanting to take his life but asking God to do it for him.

Fear gripped Elijah and I suspect that the chatter in his head took center stage. Then the Lord came to him verse 9, "what are you doing here, Elijah? Listen to his response "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty...I am the only one left, and now THEY are trying to kill me too". Really? Sounds like us doesn't it when we become afraid. Things get a little distorted with our false truths. Actually, it was only Jezebel wanting to kill him. Back in chapter 18:39 When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The Lord- he is God!

Elijah had won the people back to God, called down fire from heaven and killed 400 prophets of Baal. And he is afraid and runs from Jezebel. You'd think God would call down a lightning bolt on Elijah, right?

The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by". "Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind." "After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake." "After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire". "And after the fire came a gentle whisper." "then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty...and they are trying to kill me".

No lightning bolt. The Lord said to him "go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus". God had plans for Elijah, he wasn't done and he isn't done with us. Could all this be "surgery on the heart" so to speak in relationships with Him and each other? There is a beautiful scene being played out in the kingdom of God and we are participants, right down to the brilliant return of King Jesus, breaking into and through the cosmos, louder than a sonic boom by the heavenly hosts and trumpets play. The stage is set, the props in play. There is no time to shrink back into fear. Elijah forgot ALL that the Lord had done before and allowed himself to plunge into the Dark Night of the Soul...despair, depression. We have to face our darkness, our ugly and be willing to tell on ourselves. **When we do, fear loses its grip.** We are not alone as we listen to each others stories. Last Sunday, Steve shared his own story of depression. I smiled and thought, finely, my brother is home. We simply cannot hold onto our shame whatever that may be. We are not alone in this journey. It's amazing to watch individuals in our Overcoming Fear class at Cornerstone share their fears and how healing that is. They realize for the first time that they are not alone. We let go of shame.

Fear is the enemies tool used against us and it can be paralyzing. Look at what's happening around the world; terrorism on all fronts. Does fear grip you? Are you locked on the mass media of the world problems? That will take anyone into the desert of despair, again the Dark Night of the Soul™ (ha-ha I trademarked it, a hard read, but powerful). Time to lighten the load my brothers.

Where do we spend our time? What are the idols in our lives? Are we that different from the Burning Man Group with our idolatry of social media, collectables, gossip, work crave , have to, ought to, got to, get it together lists. Your thoughts?

I shared with you a year ago that on my 60th, the Spirit of God came to me three times and said "Tom, open wide your heart to me". Following this, He revealed to me that there was a "storm" coming. I sat before Him for two weeks and asked what that storm was. He took me into a Whirlwind Storm, and in the midst was a bed rising up into the heavens with white linens. And the Spirit of God said "those that rest in me will be lifted up." I realized at that point, it doesn't matter what our "storms" of life are.

Herein lays the heart of the Father, His desire for us in the Desert Experiences, the Storms and Whirlwinds of life ...that we Rest In Him.

From the Desert

Tom