

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

6 March 2017

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Times of Uncertainty

I have decided to write something a bit different this week. What follows is an article I wrote for my column, which was then called Roots on Deck, in December of 2002, just after I was called up for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). I was then the Deputy Command Chaplain for the I MEF (First Marine Expeditionary Force). Though still at Camp Pendleton, we were building up for the invasion of Iraq. Many thoughts were going through the minds of the Marines and sailors I was serving with. I sat down one evening in mid-December and penned these thoughts.

"Sometimes I just sits and thinks, and sometimes I just sits." So goes the old saying that could well be applied to those of us in the military right now.

Like you, we sit and watch the TV news channels and wonder what's going to happen next. Will we be going to war soon? Who of us will be engaged in that action? How long will it last? Will we be able to spend time with our families before we go? And so forth. All personal plans are on hold waiting to see what form these world events are going to take.

Uncertainty causes the mind to imagine all sorts of scenarios. Believe me, I sit and think about my office in the church in Ripon and all those comfortable surroundings, having folks stop by just to say "hi," or to ask if I've had lunch. Yet life has a way of catching us by surprise sometimes. It's then that we need to have stability. I've found that stability to be firmly established in my relationship with the living God.

It is Jesus who invites us into that special relationship through his sacrificial act on the cross. Because he paid the price with his blood for my sin, I can experience forgiveness and be welcomed into his family, thus becoming a child of God. Simply put: I belong to Jesus. Nothing in heaven or earth can, or ever will change this fact.

When times of uncertainty come, and they will come, I draw strength from Paul's words in Romans 8:38-39. *"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

So, when there are those moments of anxiousness, I go to the Rock - Jesus. In his presence, I am reminded that I am his child; that he loves me; and that I have my marching orders. I am a servant of the King. The message is to tell folks about the Savior. My congregation has heard me put it like this: "I'm nobody, telling everybody, about somebody, who can save anybody."

So as the winds of war blow across the land, I am comforted by my relationship with Jesus. This in turn enables me to bring that same comfort to others.

You see, it's Jesus who brings stability in times of uncertainty.

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Thus concludes the article I wrote then, more than fourteen years ago at the ripe age of 54.

I remember my wife only a few weeks earlier standing in our bedroom as I packed my sea bag, saying, "You really want to go, don't you?" My response was tempered. I had no desire to leave her at all, nor my two girls, especially with the uncertainty of war with the very real possibility of not returning home. I looked at her and said, "Yes, absolutely I want to go! Our country has called. I must go. We don't train in the reserves to stay home when the flag goes up." She said, "You do realize we're supposed to grow old together!" It was a declaration, not a question. I replied, "Doll, I have to go!"

Today we seem to be facing world-wide threats yet again, only this time those threats are much closer to home with the influx of people we know nothing about. My greatest concern is that there are too many wolves amongst the sheep taking up residence in America. Such an enemy against our nation is much harder to identify and root out.

The troubling thing is I have now fought in two wars. First as a Marine in Vietnam; and later as a Navy chaplain in Iraq. In both of these wars we veterans of those wars came home to a nation that had soured on the war, and by association, on our service members. We lost those wars. In fact, the last war America won was World War II. It's no fun to lose a war, with the sacrifices of the blood of patriots. But those of us who returned home, came back to an America that was still a safe haven.

Because our current threat may find us fighting an enemy within our own borders, even on the streets and byways of our communities, we must not lose our nerve. If we do, our precious liberty and freedoms will be lost to future generations of Americans. This we cannot abide.

A strong America insures a world at relative peace. A weak America throws the world into chaos. This is why our strength must come from the Lord. Dare we utter the words again, "God Bless America"?