

Roots in Ripon

Roots in Ripon

Chuck Roots

4 December 2017

www.chuckroots.com

The Ripon Bulletin

All About Christmas

Yes, it's the Advent Season where all things Christmas are on full display. Decorations have been set up in stores for quite a few weeks. Plus, the advertising has focused on what you can get for that special someone. Not to mention office parties and large gatherings to celebrate Christmas and so on.

This past weekend I was the guest speaker/preacher for a church in San Jose. It just so happens that this church is where Isaura and I were married forty-one-and-a-half years ago. It is also where I began my pastoral ministry as youth minister back in 1980 shortly after completing my master's degree at seminary.

It has been 36 years since I was last there, so returning was exciting, to say the least. Who was still there that we would know? Who had either moved on, or passed on, was another question Isaura and I wondered about. In fact, as we were driving down to San Jose later on Saturday, I commented aloud about two teenagers I had had the privilege of leading to faith in Christ in 1981. I remembered Pam's name because she was a senior at Willow Glen High School across the street from the church. But, for the life of me, I could not remember the boy's name.

One of the high school teachers contacted me asking if I would speak to her Sociology class, explaining the Christian view of Family & Marriage. Pam was in the first class I spoke to. Her boyfriend was attending another school.

After the class, Pam approached me with questions about the Christian faith. I made an appointment to meet with her in my office. She asked if she could bring her boyfriend. "You bet!" I said. As we sat and talked, it was clear to me that Pam was ready to ask Jesus into her heart. I looked at the boyfriend and asked if he wanted to accept Christ as his Savior, too. He said yes.

Back to the present. The church was having a catered dinner as part of their Missions Auction, and I was to be the guest speaker. I shared a couple of the Christmases that stood out in my life. I spoke of how I had come to know Christ as my Savior as a twenty-four-year-old sergeant in the Marine Corps in Vietnam on September 8, 1972. I returned home to my parents a week before Christmas. My sister Joy, was there, along with our grandmother, Bambi, and my brother John, who had flown out from his home in Louisiana. My first night home we all sat up talking and catching up until the wee hours of the morning. I was the last to finally

Roots in Ripon

call it a night. I was just so hyped up about being home with my family! Instead of going to my room to sleep in my bed, I grabbed several blankets and a pillow and plopped them down in front of the Christmas tree in the living room with a fire in the fireplace. I stretched out with my hands behind my head and just soaked in the reality that I was home. And best of all, I finally could celebrate Christmas for its true meaning: God loves us so much that he sent his Son, Jesus, to die for us so we could have eternal life in Him. Wow!

The other memorable Christmas I shared was one where I was not home. In the mid-1980s I was assigned as the command chaplain to the USS White Plains (AFS4). As a supply ship we were always at sea. In 1987, we were in the Indian Ocean heading for the island of Diego Garcia which is about 1200 miles south of India. We have a small naval base there, so we pulled in on December 23. That evening, the USO put on a show in one of the warehouses on the pier. This was one of Bob Hope's last tours with the USO. Lee Greenwood of "God Bless the USA!" fame, was also part of the entertainment. What a treat!

Since we still communicated the old-fashioned way back then, I had written a letter to Isaura back in Guam that I would call her on Christmas Eve from Diego Garcia, or D-Gar as we called it. There was a small building with a bank of telephones for sailors to call home. It wasn't cheap! For fifteen minutes it cost me \$50.00! But it was certainly worth it!

I paid the money, then placed the call. The way this works is, there is a meter on the phone that begins at fifteen minutes and ticks backwards until your time is up. When the phone rang, Laura, our oldest, who was nine, grabbed the phone. She said, "Hello?" I replied, "Hi Baby!" She screamed, "Daddy!" My emotions kicked in at that point, effectively shutting off my ability to speak. Then I hear Isaura on the phone say, "Hi Honey!" I wanted desperately to say something, but my throat was not cooperating. All the while I'm watching this stupid meter count down the amount of time I have left. I managed to squeak out, "Give me a minute." I gathered myself enough to have a wonderful conversation with her and also to speak to our youngest, Jenny, who was then 6. I missed them all so much!

So, back to my speaking engagement last weekend. I was to preach Sunday morning, so Isaura and I arrived early and sat in the sanctuary listening to the worship team practice. They took a break just before the service was to begin, at which point one of the men from the worship team walked over to introduce himself. He appeared to be middle-aged. I stood to shake hands, only to hear him say, "I'm Richard. I don't know if you remember me or not." I told him that I did not. He said, "I was dating Pam back then." Well blow me over! This 17-year-old I had led to Christ in my office is now a 53-year-old husband and father, playing guitar with the church worship team!

This Christmas Season has begun wonderfully for me! I trust it will be equally exciting for you, as well!