

SPRING 08 NEWSLETTER

Three Trees

By: Joyce Partyka

Once there were three trees on a hill in the woods. They were discussing their hopes and dreams when the first tree said, "Someday I hope to be a treasure chest. I could be filled with gold, silver and precious gems. could be decorated with intricate carving and everyone would see the beauty." Then the second tree said, "Someday I will be a mighty ship. I will take kings and queens across the waters and sail to the corners of the world.

Everyone will feel safe in me because of the strength of my hull." Finally the third tree said, "I want to grow to be the tallest and straightest tree in the forest. People will see me on top of the hill and look up to my branches, and think of the heavens and God and how close to them I am reaching. I will be the greatest tree of all time and people will always remember me."

After a few years of praying that their dreams would come true, a group of woodsmen came upon the trees. When one came to the first tree he said, "This looks like a strong tree, I think I should be able to sell the wood to a carpenter" ... and he began cutting it down. The tree was happy, because he knew that the carpenter would make him into a treasure chest. At the second tree a woodsman said, "This looks like a strong tree, I should be able to sell it to the shipyard." The second tree was happy because he knew he was on his way to becoming a mighty ship. When the woodsmen came upon the third tree, the tree was frightened because he knew that if they cut him down his dreams would not come true. One of the woodsmen said, "I don't need anything special from my tree so I'll take this one", and he cut it down."

When the first tree arrived at the carpenters, he was made into a feed box for animals. He was then placed in a barn and filled with hay. This was not at all what he had prayed for. The second tree was cut and made into a small fishing boat. His dreams of being a mighty ship and carrying kings had come to an end. The third tree was cut into large pieces and left alone in the dark.

The years went by, and the trees forgot about their dreams. Then one day, a man and woman came to the barn. She gave birth and they placed the baby in the hay in the feed box that was made from the first tree. The man wished that he could have made a crib for the baby, but this manger would have to do. The tree could feel the importance of this event and knew that it had held the greatest treasure of all time.

Years later, a group of men got in the fishing boat made from the second tree. One of them was tired and went to sleep. While they were out on the water, a great storm arose and the tree didn't think it was strong enough to keep the men safe. The men woke the sleeping man, and he stood and said "Peace" and the storm stopped. At this time, the tree knew that it had carried the King of Kings in its boat.

Finally, someone came and got the third tree. It was carried through the streets as the people mocked the man who was carrying it. When they came to a stop, the man was nailed to the tree and raised in the air to die at the top of a hill. When Sunday came, the tree came to realize that it was strong enough to stand at the top of the hill and be as close to God as was possible, because Jesus had been crucified on it.

The moral of this story is that when things don't seem to be going your way, always know that God has a plan for you. If you place your trust in Him, He will give you great gifts. Each of the trees got what they wanted, just not in the way they had imagined. We don't

**always know what God's plans are for us. We just know that His ways are not our ways,
but His ways are always best.**

Trip of a Lifetime

By: Caitlin Blair

I realize that this is a pretty common experience for college students of faith. However, I feel that amongst all of the amazing things that have happened to me this semester, my alternative spring break trip with my church at Michigan State was by far the most influential and changing experience I've had in 2008. We piled a bunch of students, a pastor, and a couple of senior members of the church into a few vans and drove from East Lansing, Michigan, down to Mobile, Alabama to do Habitat for Humanity work on the Gulf.

My crew was working on the small house of a large Cambodian immigrant family in Bayou la Batre, Alabama. We worked full days and then came home to the church that was housing us back in Mobile for dinner, devotions, and time together. It doesn't sound like much, but my week in Alabama gave me time to reflect on my own life as well as to grow in my relationship with God.

The family on whose house we were working came in every day with fresh, homemade food for our entire crew to eat at lunchtime. This particularly touched me because even though these people had almost nothing, they worked hard to give us food (amazing food!) every day as a way to express their gratitude. Although we were of different faiths, they would pray with us before every meal and show the utmost respect toward our traditions. When some of us mentioned this to our Lutheran Disaster Response coordinator Marcy, she said that initially a large portion of the local Asian-Pacific immigrant population lived in poverty before and had been absolutely devastated by Hurricane Katrina. At first, no one wanted any of the help that was being offered to them by groups like LDR, because many people questioned the motives of Christian workers. (The general sentiment seemed to be that many people were used to cultures focused around fending for oneself and couldn't understand why anyone would come to Alabama to help *them*.) However, work groups in the area gradually gained the trust of local residents by coming in, working hard, and showing that they had no ulterior motives. According to Marcy, groups like ours had become accepted and appreciated by the local population because instead of pushing our faith on others, we demonstrated it by helping our neighbors in need.

To me, this was the most important lesson of our trip. We can beat what we say we believe into others all we want, but in the end it is how we demonstrate the values that found our beliefs and how we represent God in the world that make us truly Christian. Seeing my friends (both old and new) use their God-given gifts to help others without profit or motive and seeing those gifts received purely and lovingly is what touched me the most about my experience. By far, this was one of the best experiences of my year.

Stepping Out

By: Jessica Messner (IMOK President)

As many of you may already know, I lead a bible study for three high school girls at my home church, Trinity Lutheran. This year, the girls and I are studying the book of Mark. Our last lesson was on Mark 5: 21-42. If you do not know what this passage is about off the top of your head, let me refresh your memory. At the beginning of this passage, a man named Jarius, who happens to be a synagogue leader, falls to his knees and begs Jesus to come and heal his dying daughter. What is interesting about this is that throughout the first half of the book of Mark we only hear about Jesus healing the lowly. But, in this passage, Jesus is approached not by the lowly, but by a Pharisee.

Back to the story though, as Jesus is on his way to heal Jarius' daughter, a woman who has been bleeding for 12 years reaches through the crowd and touches Jesus. Instantly, she is healed. Jesus feels the power leave him and asks the crowd who touched him. The crowd responded with, "We are all touching you." Jesus then asked for the person who touched him to come forward. The woman who had been bleeding fell at Jesus' feet. Jesus told her that she was healed because she had faith. What is strange about this is that throughout most of Mark we encounter the Messianic Secret, which is when Jesus tells people to keep quiet about the miracles that he performs. But, in this instance, Jesus points out the miracle to the crowd.

Getting back to the story though, a group of men run up to Jarius and tell him that his daughter has died. Jesus ignores them and tells Jarius to have faith. They arrive at Jarius' house. Everyone in the house was weeping loudly. Jesus tells everyone to cheer up because the girl isn't dead. He says, "This girl isn't dead; she's only sleeping." Then,

Jesus tells the girl to get up. The girl gets up and Jesus tells someone to get her a sandwich. Finally, before Jesus leaves, he asks Jarius and his family not to tell anyone about this miracle. To me, this is a strange thing to say, especially since the whole town was probably waiting outside of Jarius' home to see what happened. I mean everyone will see that the girl is alive.

But, anyway, the reason I wanted to share this story with you all is that sometimes we need to step out in faith. Of course, sometimes this is easier said than done.

Nonetheless, God asks us to trust in him. Personally, I have a hard time giving my problems and worries to God. More often than not, I try to handle things myself. Sure, occasionally things go my way, but, for the most part, I find that I get the best results when I let God handle things. So, I encourage you all to give whatever is stressing or worrying you to God. You will be amazed at how awesome it feels to have that weight lifted off of your shoulders. It is a beautiful thing when we communicate with God and let him be the father that he has always wanted to be to us. So, surrender yourselves to his will and experience his amazing love and awesome power. Amen.

Is “No-Gift” A Gift?

By: Daryl Mowrey

When asked to write about my own spiritual gift, I was flabbergasted. I suppose that I had never really thought about it. However, when trying to think of my own spiritual gift, I was trying to think of tasks that I did, or can accomplish, exceedingly well. Unfortunately, I was drawing a blank. At first, I thought that I simply wasn't making the effort and that there must be something, anything, that I was better at than everyone else, but of course, there was not. Frustrated, I tried to think of things that I enjoy doing, and immediately the list became quite long. I then wondered if maybe, just maybe, my gift was not the ability to do one skill or trait exceedingly well, but to be able to do all skills to a degree of mediocrity. This is kind of the idea of “Jack of all trades, master of none.” This seemed to me to be my “gift.” My ability to do a little bit of everything, but not being able to do anything extremely well.

Even though this may seem like an unlikely gift, I think that it has come quite handy. Because of this gift, I have been able to see the world through many different lenses. I have done menial labor, as well as attend classes that teach me how to be a professional businessman. I have been a band geek, as well as a jock on the soccer field. To name all of the things I have done would be pointless and would only serve to inflate my “ego-balloon,” but the point is that this gift makes it so that I can never jump to conclusions about people. Whenever someone tries to broadly paint a category of people, be it so drastic as painting all black-people, or as simple as painting all nerds, I realize that this is ridiculous. From the many different vantage points one learns the simple, but valuable, lesson that people are people, no matter what they do, where they work, or how they think. Of course, this has also allowed me to be much more open-minded to what others have to say, as there have been times that either I have tried to share an idea of what is going on and have been ignored, or I have watched others’ ideas be ignored.

So how does all of this relate to God? I mean, if I consider this a “spiritual gift,” should I not include the spiritual aspect? The answer, I believe, is quite simple. Being able to do a little bit of everything, makes it easier for me to relate to other people, and in turn for those other people to relate to me. If I was extremely good at something, then those who partake of that one skill with me may idolize me in some ways and thus not come to me on an equal basis. Conversely, if I was the worst, I would be looked down upon and possibly scorned, and thus I would not be able to have any meaningful conversations with those around me, let alone those outside my little “skill-sphere” so to speak. So this ability to do everything to a certain degree of mediocrity in fact allows me to connect with a broader spectrum of people, and see life from their point of view. This in turn allows me to relate God to their lives better as I can relate to them better. When people can finally relate God to their own lives, then the experience they have in church, and out of it hopefully, becomes much more rich and textured. So though I may not be able to do any one thing really well, I can reach out to others through doing many tasks to an adequate degree of satisfaction.