

May 1, 2010 "VIA DOLOROSA '7' ON THE HISTORY BOOKS"

Dear Friends & Family,

(4/11) It was a week ago last evening that our church finished its 7th season of its biggest event of the year, "Via Dolorosa". Pastor estimated that we had over 800 people walk through it this year, over the three days we held it. Groups were divided up into 20 or less, & ushered through the church, starting with a new group every 15 minutes. They would visit each stop for approximately eight minutes. These included The Marketplace, The Last Supper, The Garden of Gethsemane, The Sanhedrin, Herod's Palace, The Roman Barracks, The Fortress Antonia (Pilate's Quarters), The Dungeon, a reflection stop, Calvary, & Communion at the end. It took weeks to "morph" the church into 1st century Jerusalem. In all but two of the stations, actors would perform a drama. Playing Pilate & being responsible for the Roman Quarters, I would perform my first drama in The Fort,

then follow the audience into The Dungeon, where I would continue the drama. This translated into a continuous role-playing each night with only a few minutes break in between groups. Hence, I performed over 80 times throughout the three days Via was held. A considerable amount of that time Pilate was "yelling".

Hence, I would

be so drained at the end of the night, as our actual performance time would be 3-4 hours. I also had responsibility

to costume in whole or in part over 20 Via personnel, including the Roman Quarters, the Courtyard, Herod's Palace, & The Sanhedrin. After our last performance last Saturday evening, my first inclination is to take a much-deserved rest for a few days after weeks of setup & days of performance. But, alas, this was not to be as there is so much tear-down to do, particularly before Easter Sunday morning. As is usually the case after ministry events, I am still "wired" & full of energy. Hence, I worked on tearing down Via for 3 & ½ hours after concluded. Needless to say, fatigue definitely sets in a few days afterwards! I think it's fair to say that Via for me has become as work & time "intensive" as summer camps. It makes it all worth it when we receive so very many praise reports from guests & visitors after it is all over. I've copied & pasted some of them below, all to Jesus's glory, is my fervent prayer:

\*"There was so much we appreciated:

The organization, flow and creativity

The rooms set with props, artwork, smells. We really felt transported to the time

We so appreciated all the actors and the time spent in getting ready and then playing out the role of their character. Anyway, then on to Pilate.....WOW!.....is this guy an actor...so good! Can't say enough of his role. I had never gone in my mind to ponder Pilate and what he was thinking while all of this was going on. The Roman Soldiers were excellent too. At one point one of the younger kids (7-9 years old) got up because he thought the service was over and the Roman Soldier told him in a mad face "sit down!"....yikes! the boy took it well, but totally out of part. I appreciated the historical parts of the political side. It's like it didn't make it fluff and clean, it was.....nitty gritty stuff....

\*It was so inspired by God's word and so beautifully executed. I can't imagine the number of hours spent on just refurbishing the rooms in your church to replicate the places where Jesus spent His last days.

\*What a terrific production the Good Friday service was at your church!!! We LOVED it. It meant the world to me to be there with everyone. For me it was profoundly important for my children to experience that many people taking that much time and effort and talent to make that story come to life. I loved the hallways dor

up with the lanterns & the cloth draped everywhere. I loved the trapped feeling of the keys and chains lock us all in the room to witness the whipping scene. I loved the "map room" with Pilate washing his hands. Love the scene...spitting on Jesus and sneering and laughing. I loved the neon sign "for God so Loved" that brought us into the present with our part of the story.

\*...your presentation of Via Dolorosa was outstanding!! THE COMPLETE PACKAGE WAS WELL DONE!! Acting costume, [the style was certainly representative of the times]. Hard work was demonstrated to create the time in history that Jesus walked on this earth. Your scene with Jesus on the cross, VERY MOVING!! I congratulate you for bringing this magnificent event to reality for non-believers and true believers!! I also congratulate your complete cast for an outstanding performance THANK YOU,

\*It was such a moving experience this year for me. Even Dad was wiping eyes. And Guerty is top drawer. He really should be in a movie focusing on Biblical documentations. You were also great as Herod.

\*The Via Dolorosa was the most profound rendition of the final hours of Jesus Christ I have ever witnessed. The lay out of the various chambers left me totally focused as to what was unfolding in each room. The realism was stark. Because the portrayal was so realistic, it put a serious undertone of which I had to consider what Jesus had to go through. Very well done by the entire church, no playing around. The gospel of Christ very serious thing to consider and act upon. All eternity rides on it.

One of the best outreach programs I have ever witnessed.

\*Via Dolorosa was awesome, fantastic, grandiose, etc. Three of our grandchildren were challenged anew of what Jesus did for us.

\*It was fabulous!

\*I went last night and we must say that we thoroughly enjoyed the entire event, indeed! It was quite AWESOME...Each skit was marvelously played out...The attention to detail was great also at each station. Costumes were fantastic and background decor, too...our group was teary-eyed as I'm sure all groups were.

\*Each year we are more moved by the performance. Our neighbors who came with us were speech-less with the production. They thought that the church had hired professional actors and actresses to perform...I'm sure there is nothing comparable in the state of DE.

\*My children & niece were amazed at all the props that helped to further substantiate the experience. I was awed by the amount of adults that gave of their time to come and act. We all came away with something that the Lord impressed upon us. My children were also amazed at the level of acting, it was believable, it was authentic...Today my nine year old daughter told me that last night she made a commitment to Jesus and even though she had done this before by all she witnessed last night she had no idea of all that Jesus had done for her & she claims that April 2 (Good Friday night's performance) is her conversion date!

\*We are so glad to have made the trek to Wilmington. The Via Dolorosa was a moving experience for us. I personally was very touched at the crucifixion, and could certainly place myself among those who crucified Jesus. It still brings me to tears. We were so impressed by the magnitude of the experience. A lot of hard work goes into that! And to have such participation among the members of the church. Wow! Pontius Pilate...the character came alive for us.

\*Via Dolorosa has a powerful impact in making the last few hours of Jesus life/purpose so real.

\*Made my Via debut tonight. It was awesome! So glad I came.

\*Great job. My kids loved it. We're glad we came.

"THE WOOD & THE WIND"

(4/13) While lighting & watching what most likely will be our last fire of the season, my heart was burdened

with an ache before the Lord. “Oh Lord, what does it take to light a fire among Your people?” What came to me was our camp theme from 2006, “The Fireplace”. The two major ingredients of a successful fire are the wood & the wind. That is, the proper wood, & enough air circulating in between them to ensure adequate burning. I liken the wood, the fuel to God’s fire, to sound doctrine. Worship, awe, freedom, & zeal all come from knowing the truth. And yet, such doctrine must have the wind of God’s Spirit blowing all through it. The Church in ages past has witnessed eras of “cold orthodoxy”. This is because the doctrinal wood “was stacked with no wind or air able to blow through it. Stacked wood doesn’t burn well. But wooden logs that have “space” allow the “Wind” to circulate, & ignite the wood that brings warmth & light. Oh, may we have in these doctrinally-diluted days freshly stacked wood, strategically situated, so as to allow God’s Spirit to breathe on & ignite God’s Word afresh into our hearts.

“‘OSTRICH SYNDROME’: I DON’T WANT TO BE HEALED OF IT!”

From recent newsletters, some of you will remember that I have been pondering, delving into, trying to fathom & then preach re: our Lord’s unfathomable sufferings. It is an endless, impossible, yet enamoring endeavor. I’ve been recently reading G.C. Berkouwer’s “The Work Of Christ” re: the suffering of Jesus. The more I read, the more I was in awe. I couldn’t help but want to read more. I kept coming back to it. I was actually living my favorite Bible verse for many years: “I am determined to know nothing among you, but Jesus Christ, & Him crucified” (1 Cor.2:2). I felt as if my head were buried in this stirring topic, just like an ostrich, who supposedly buries his head in the sand—yet, I didn’t want to pull my head out of this awe-inspiring Subject. When I did finally go to other things in my mind, I felt very deeply, “What else is there to look at?” How can you even think to “go somewhere else” in your mind? The unfathomable sufferings of the God-Made-the-King & Creator of the Universe are worthy of eternal contemplation! “Here might I stay & sing no story divine. Never was grief, dear King, never was love, like Thine” (S. Crossan). When I did “pull my head out”, my heart sank as it pondered the sons of men, going about, with their day to day busyness, not knowing, or even worse, not caring that the Son of God was treated like a piece of meat in a butcher shop! And yet, God, foreknowing, allowing, & hence foreordaining that all of this would happen, to glorify Jesus in the greatest possible way, still sent Him!

“ONLY YOU? ABOVE ALL? HARDLY!”

It has happened again. Ugh. I shouldn’t be sickened by it, but I am. The person who said it meant well. They meant to glorify God & comfort & encourage my wife & me. Alas, however, it did just the opposite. It made me sick at heart. Some of you may remember I mentioned briefly in last month’s newsletter that contrary to the very popular song “Above All” chorus’ ending, Jesus did NOT think of “me” above all in His enduring the cross & its horrific, in-describable sufferings & agonies. He laid His life down at the command of His Father! Father’s will, pleasure, & glory were Jesus’ foremost & first thought & motivation to go through with it. Nothing personal, Beloved, but you are just not enough motivation to be His primary one! Yes, the redemption of His people is a major one, but not His primary motive “above all”! Anyway, this well-intentioned person said to us, “If you were the only two people who ever lived, Jesus still would have come & died for you”. Impossible! It sounds good, warm, & soothing, but it is so very unscriptural, as so many “good sounding” doctrines are! Father would NEVER have Jesus go through the depths of the horrors of His just wrath in the place of His people, without making sure His sufferings would be “worth it”! This is why the Father gave to Him a people in eternity past

before the foundation of the world (Eph.1:4).

So very many times in John, Jesus refers to His disciples as those whom the Father had given Him! (Jn.6:37,39,10:29,17:2,6,9,24). God knew His people beforehand (Rom.8:29), chose them (I Cor.1:26ff), set their destinies beforehand (Rom.8:29), etc...& gave Him "children" (Heb.2:13). The reward for His sufferings was a people from His Father, not to mention being raised to His right hand in glory! His Father ensured Him that He would make it worth it. Father would never risk the investment of His Son's sufferings like investors on Wall Street! With God, there is no "risk" involved, but a sure return on His investment! You I, Beloved, are proofs & "trophies" of His marvelous grace. It is because of HIM, that you are in Christ Jesus! (Cor.1:30). May our lives reflect heartfelt gratitude for The One Who took our place!  
Kim & I thank you so very much, for reading this, for your prayers, & gifts when God so leads.

Michael & Kim