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May 2021

"Villains of Via" Inaugural Season In the History Books



Dear **Friends & Family**,

<https://youtu.be/1fiGJu03LUQ> [**Villains of Via** Good Friday performance 2021] It seems like a dream now that **Villains of Via** even happened. And yet, it was a dream-come-true for me. After a 16-year run, with Via Dolorosa not happening last year due to **Covid**, & then eventually being canceled forever for a plethora of reasons, I couldn't get it out of my spirit. I was told of Pastor **Chris Dito** of **Parkview AG Church**, whom I had never met. I heard his heart was geared for outreach & evangelism. I contacted him. We met. We dreamed [he runs *The Dream Center* which is a huge building not far from his church that he uses for said outreach], we pondered, we planned. We first pondered as to whether we could do the conventional Via setup, i.e., in numerous rooms that the audience would visit one at a time. But, given the short amount of time, the vast amount of work setup would entail [we would typically take two weeks or more to set up for conventional Via], & because of **Covid** precaution, we decided to do all three episodes of "the villains" in the sanctuary.

“THIS IS A ‘SETUP!’”



The key to doing Via in this format was the stage crew. Throughout the years of Via, our Lord has graciously “packed a punch” after certain dramas of Via were performed. The three rooms/ episodes that comprised “Villains of Via” [a term I gave years ago to *Caiaphas, Herod, & Pilate*] were three such rooms/stations of the thirteen that comprised Via that did pack such a “punch”. To have them performed on the same stage in succession, trusting that “punch” would once again occur, I was worried how to “retain the stun” as long as possible after a given episode was performed. Logistics-wise, of course, the next room’s props had to be setup as soon as possible. I longed for the audience to receive the impact of the episode just performed, & not have it dissipate while they waited for the next episode to be setup. Thanks to Trevor Martin, Adam Pierce, & a crew of diligent sisters in the Lord, this was accomplished. I truly believe one of the keys to *Villains of Via’s* success was the proficiency of the stage crew. They excelled-& this after never having done or seen Via before [for all but one of them, i.e.]. I couldn’t thank our Lord enough that He would be willing to “resurrect Via” once again. At the same time, I must admit the “resurrection” was bittersweet.

“IN THE ZONE”



Years ago while on a horse at camp doing my “*Gettysburg*” field drama, one of the counselors said something to the effect of, “Hey Guert-chill out, huh?!” When I act, I get into “the zone”. I

immerse myself into the character. Via Dolorosa at Immanuel Church for 16 years was my own personal wonderland. Each day as I headed to church to continue the two-week + process of setup, I would go deeper into Via. I'll never forget one woman who visited Via for the first time said, "When I first got to Via, I thought to myself, 'This is just another of many church dramas. However, the deeper I went into Via the more lost in the era & engrossed I became.'" Many people through the years said they couldn't recognize our Immanuel Church building because of how morphed it became into first century Jerusalem. For about two months [at least?] I would get lost in my "Via Zone". I loved it. I wanted to stay there. It took me many days after Via was over to "come out of it". I cannot describe the feeling, Beloved. While I was so grateful to have a place this Easter season to perform but a small part of Via, it can never replace Via at Immanuel. As I type I'm listening to the soundtracks of **Quo Vadis** [1951] & **The Robe** [1953]-two of my all-time favorite movies that I watch every Easter/Via season. Yes, I admit it. I would have loved to have played **Robert Taylor & Richard Burton's** parts in them. One of the highest compliments I've ever received in my life was from my wife **Kim**. A few years ago, while once again watching **The Robe**, Kim said to me, "Richard Burton reminds me of you." Whew. I admit every time I watch **The Robe** I both envy & want to be Richard Burton. No, sadly-not the Richard Burton in real life-but the "Mar-cellus" character whom he so adeptly portrayed. I admit it-it's hard to let the Easter/Via season go. Spring has become my favorite season when for most of my life it was Fall. Spring is Easter, Via Dolorosa, the vast array of colors of new blooms, warmth in the air, etc. I've told Kim many times I hope so much it's Spring-time in Heaven. Will Via continue? Will Via grow? I honestly don't know. But I certainly hope so. I only pray when it's time for me to let Via go, that our Father will work in me to will & do of His good pleasure. But for now? I dream of next year.

"TIME TO SHIFT GEARS"



Every year it is the same-as the dust & afterglow of Via finally subsides in my heart, my three annual **Hopewell Network** summer camps are knocking on my head to awaken me from my glorious "Via stupor". This will be my **39th year** in camp ministry of some kind. "Michael, why do you keep going back?" Because, "in the last days perilous times will come" [II Tim.3:1]. They're here, Beloved. They're here. I know for countless generations this text from Timothy has been applied to one's own time that they lived in. For America, though-they are here. The rapid

succession of radical changes in our country's government, the stupor that most of the American public has been in since the Covid pandemic, blindly obeying every new mandate/ law/policy that comes down & so often changes, etc., the fear that is upon so many, etc., the increased hostility in our country against any God-based convictions & thought that goes against the narrative, etc., the capitulation of so many Christian leaders & ministries during the pandemic, etc. Yes-we need to have camps. I met recently with two youth pastors & told them I've striven for years to have the Network camps be "text-driven" & biblically-based, etc. Too many Christian camps have so much hype in them. It is very easy to hype-up young people-very easy. I strive to have the experiences our campers & staff have at camp be based & rooted upon **a response to the Scripture**. Emotions come & go, & often can be misleading. Are emotions God-given? They sure are. But emotions must be based upon truth. Many, many aberrant cults & Christian movements have much emotion-yet little or no truth. So many campers & staff, including myself, get depressed when camp is over as one cannot have such high concentration upon the things of the Lord & *not* long to be back there! Yet-camp is not the norm. Hence, I strive to inculcate in the young people to dig deeply into the Sacred Text, where God's deepest fountains of **Holy Spirit** experience lie waiting for them *in the foundations of the Word*.

"WHY DO CAMPS?"



I cannot say it better than a woman from the past did. Her name was **Frances Kemble Butler**. She describes a near-death experience she had while on a vessel out at sea during a fierce storm. "As the vessel reeled under a tremendous shock, the conviction of our impending destruction became so intense in my mind, that my imagination suddenly presented to me the 'death-vision', so to speak, of my whole existence. I should find it impossible to adequately describe the vividness with which my whole past life presented itself to my perception; **not** as a procession of events, filling up a succession of years, but as a whole-a total-suddenly held up to me, as in a mirror, **indescribably awful, combined with the simultaneous, acute, & almost despairing sense of loss, of waste**, so to speak, by which it was accompanied. This instantaneous, involuntary retrospect, was followed by a keen & rapid survey of **the religious belief in which I had been trained, & which then seemed to me my only important concern.**" [Wm. G.T. Shedd, Dogmatic Theology, Vol.1, pp. 350,351, 19th century]. What did Miss Butler become overwhelmed with upon a whole instantaneous survey of her life? **Loss. Waste. Loss.**

Waste. So often these two words describe the average young person's life. "Too soon old-too late smart", as the old saying goes. "Teach us to number our days, that we might become wise." [Ps.90:12]. Young people gorge on the frivolous & foolish constantly. Why? Because they're *young*. No one is born with wisdom. It is slowly acquired-by life-experience & the Word of the Lord. "I have more insight than all of my teachers, because Your testimonies are my meditation. I have more understanding than the elders, because I obey Your precepts". [Ps.119:99-100]. It is the exception to the case for the young *not* to waste their youth. At camp, we strive to lift the campers' vision higher-to *things eternal*. What was Miss Butler's only concern & highest priority as she faced imminent death?? "The religious belief in which ***she had been trained.***" "Had been" trained. Past tense. That is our goal & vision at camp-to train up the child & teen in the way he or she should go in addition to what his or her parents do. In too many cases, sadly, the parents don't, either because they themselves don't know the Lord, or are too overwhelmed with the cares of this life. Hence, here we are. We attempt to be the parents' support, scaffolding, & backup. Often, we act in place of the parent, which is not our wish. But the young must be trained up in the fear & admonition of the Lord [Eph.6:4]. "While I was young & still tender, my father taught me..." [Pr. 4:3,4]. **Aristotle** put it well many centuries ago: "All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind are convinced that the fate of empires depends on ***the education of youth.***" [emphasis mine].

"DEVOTED"



The theme of camp this summer is actually a theme I picked for last summer until I realized last summer was "2020". How could I not employ "20/20" vision for the camp theme of that same year which would only occur once in the history of man?? And yes, I'm sure 10,000 other Christian camps last summer chose the same theme! "I remember the **devotion of your youth...** when you followed after Me..." was the lament of the Lord through the prophet Jeremiah concerning His people Israel when they were very young in their relationship with Him [Jer.2:2]. My ache once again for the campers & staff this summer is the same that it has been for the past 30 summers at Tel Hai Campà **devotion** to the Lord. How does one incite said devotion in the hearts of God's people, especially the young? Devotion occurs as a response that God elicits from the heart of a person whom He's revealed Himself to; His perfections, vis, His glory. Many seek "manifestations" & signs to ignite their fervor. While I ache for the miraculous in our day my deepest longing is to see the glorious perfections of God's attributes & character revealed in the camp. How?

“THE PERFECT BLEND”



The key is & has always been the Word of God coupled or “blended” with the Spirit of God. That is how you “see” God. And, of course, you see Him in His people, especially those who are filled with His Word & His Spirit.

[4/24] "MEAT MARKET"



When Kim & I went to prayer last evening pacing around the bottom floor of our house as we usually do, I was entreating the Lord to supply me this summer with His choice of camp staff. Seeing the demise our society is in, the expression came to my mind for the first time ever that camp needs to be a “meat market” spiritually. The times call for spiritual meat for the campers & staff, with teachings & sermons filled with choice cuts of the doctrines of God. May it be so.

"THE COVID JELLYFISH"



Also while pacing & praying & pondering how much the Covid pandemic has radically changed & affected both Church, State, & society, I saw in my mind a massive jellyfish. It was over the world. Jellyfish are translucent but not transparent. Looking through one all one can see is blurred. Covid has caused so much confusion & loss of vision & direction as our poor head pastors have to navigate their flocks through it. Jellyfish also have poisonous tentacles that stun & kill its prey. Covid has done just that. My ache in prayer was for a clear manifestation of God’s truth this summer at camp. **William G.T. Shedd** whose work I cited above also said in the 19th century ***“The glory of God means such a manifestation of the Divine perfections as leads creatures to worship & adore. Adoration is the highest act of a creature and the revealed excellence of the Creator is the object that elicits it.”*** [ibid. p.357] [emphases mine]. My deepest ache for decades while ministering is that when I’m finished God’s people would be led to “adore on the floor”. May He greatly help me in this very unique, trying, & difficult year to do so. My life-verse for decades has been, “I am determined to know nothing among you, except

Jesus Christ-& Him crucified.” May our camps ring with that purpose this coming summer.
Amen.

Sincerely, [Michael](#)



***Caboose! Commentary Corner:** [Our daughter Laura once said she'd love to have my old Bibles when I passed for all of the notes I have written in them over the decades. This was quite humbling to say the least, especially coming from one of your own children. Hence, I've decided to post each month random notes/comments from Bibles I have studied from: [Beloved, I can only tell you that what I'm about to type had to be providential. How so? After writing about camp & the manifestation of God's perfections above I went out to our side room to my parents' old drop leaf desk to peruse in one of my old Bibles for a quote to enlist above. I opened up my old NIV which I was in for about 30 years. There was a little note right inside which says the following: "If I could have one wish re: all of my years at Tel Hai, I wouldn't want to be remembered for my: 1. Dramas, which I love. 2. Props & Time Machine dramas. 3. Games. 4. Puns, etc. If someone were to ask "Whose tombstone is that outside the Hemlock Hall chapel?" [Note: for decades now it has been my deepest wish to be buried there], I would want someone to reply, "Michael was one who taught me by example, by practice & precept, to approach our God with awe & holy reverence & to lay before Him for extended periods of time, where I became like Him." Oh, may it be so!



[Caboose! On the Loose!](#)
[Looking Out for the Little Ones](#)

Ministry/Events for **MAY** & those not listed in last month's newsletter:

April 6: Villains of Via final tear-down

April 18: Immanuel Church, Wilmington, DE: worship team drummer & 4 & 5 year-olds' ministry puppet show

April 19: New Holland, PA: hsc camp personnel mtg.

April 21: Elim area credential holders zoom mtg.

May 4: Petra Church, New Holland, PA: hsc board mtg.//Network pastors' mtg.

May 5: Hopewell Christian Fellowship, Elverson, PA: youth group speaker

May 8-13: Springfield, VA: to assist Kim's Mom

May 2, 9, 16, 23, 30: *Chip Sunday Show* video productions

May 4: Petra Christian Fellowship, New Holland, PA: hsc board mtg.//pastors mtg.

May 5, 12, 19, 26: *Cab!Talk* Bible expository video productions



*Michael is an ordained *Elim Fellowship* itinerant Stateside missionary & is also licensed to preach the gospel by *Immanuel Church*, Wilmington, DE. *Caboose!* is also an affiliate ministry of *The Hopewell Network of Churches*. For 14 years he served on various local church staffs as their children's pastor. Since 2000 Kim & he have lived by faith, having no set salary, retirement, etc. to speak of. Yet-this is their calling at this season of their lives. Michael

preaches God's Word & systematic theology, using both drama & visual aids, to all age groups, from children to senior citizens, either separately or combined. To help support this work [any amount no matter how small is greatly appreciated!], please make all tax-deductible gifts payable to: Elim Fellowship, c/o 1703 Dalton Rd., Lima, NY 14485, marking it "Preferred-Michael Robert Guertin" or you may click on the link below to give directly. Any gift no matter how small would be greatly appreciated! Thank you! [click here](#)

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