

- **KINDRED SPIRITS, KINGDOM HEARTS**

When Victor phoned me and asked if I would speak at this 15th Anniversary Appreciation Banquet I was very pleased. I can well remember the beginning of this ministry. First it was Don DeWalt writing us and inviting us to attend a Unity gathering here at Joplin. Then there were the monthly newspapers promoting Unity which Don called ONE BODY. As I read these publications I soon became acquainted with the name Victor Knowles. Finally in 1987 I became acquainted with Victor as the Minister of the Fairview Christian Church in Carthage. Then I learned that Don DeWalt had chosen Victor as the co-editor of One Body.

My love and appreciation of Victor has grown more and more as the years have gone by. When my wife and I heard from Victor that he was resigning his ministry at Carthage and going full-time as the editor of One Body to promote Christian Unity and that he would have to raise his support, we immediately decided to support him. We never knew until years later that we were the first to respond to his initial appeal for support. That was not our motivation in responding but we are now very happy to be known as the FIRST TWO persons to support Victor and Evelyn in their ministry.

In John 17 our Lord prayed for Christian Unity and World Evangelism. As this has been the heartbeat of Victor and Evelyn, not just from 1992 when they founded this ministry now called POEM, but the heartbeat of their entire lives, we think it very appropriate that Victor chose KINDRED SPIRITS, KINGDOM HEARTS as the theme for this 15th Anniversary Appreciation Banquet.

63 years ago when I was a freshman student at Miami High School in Miami, Okla. I first met up with another new phrase, "Ropeholders". Russell Martin, my minister at First Christian Miami, Okla. Had brought a missionary family to visit in our congregation. They were Harold and Ada Taylor. They were seeking help in order to go to China. Brother Russell asked for 100 members of the Miami church to give \$1 per month to meet this need.

We were to be known as the Ropeholders. As a boy in High School I was earning lots of money because I had a man's job. This was during World War II and with all the young men serving in the Army and Navy I worked as I attended school. Since I was making money, it was easy for me to pledge to give \$1 per month to help send Harold and Ada Taylor to China. I was thrilled to be one of the original Ropeholders and I proudly kept that pledge for years. Harold and Ada soon had to leave China and they then moved to Korea.

Years

later I had the thrill of going to Korea to preach with Harold Taylor in his mission that I had helped to support.

100 members of the Miami church quickly signed up and we were thrilled to give the financial support month by month so that Harold and Ada Taylor could go preach in a faraway land. How significant was that name Ropeholders. A great crowd of folk now had a personal positive interest in that mission field and thus in all missionary activity, because with our dollars we were sustaining the Gospel of Christ overseas. I think KINDRED SPIRITS, KINGDOM HEARTS could have also described our group of Ropeholders.

Now there is a very real sense in which God has called you and me to be a ropeholder. All of us must sustain the life-line to some other soul. One day a fire of religious revival was kindled in a few out of the way places. Humble hamlets and rural communities began to seethe with the conviction that always accompanies the earnest preaching of our Lord's gospel. The dynamic messengers of that early hour remembered a man on a cross laying down His life for the sins of the world. Best of all, they vividly remembered that He was more than a man for a tomb stood empty in the Garden of the Arimathean, Joseph. They had heard His great commission, "Go into the world and preach my gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." Rome and its earthly power capitulated to this stranger of Galilee and His gospel in one century. Persecution only gave impetus to His eternal message. Everywhere men and women felt they were ropeholders. They knew the victory might depend on them. My friends, we serve a wonderful Saviour. Always, He presses His claims upon us and cries again and again, "the harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few."

In olden days, it was not uncommon for the people to build homes on the walls of the cities. It was customary to lower baskets from the balconies of the homes and to pull up fruits and flowers from the gardens. Even to this day these baskets are used for a like purpose. There was a city that folk commonly termed, "the eye of the East." It was a city of white and glistening architecture and was once distinguished for swords of the best materials. These were known as Damascus blades. A horseman named Saul who hailed from Tarsus was one day riding to Damascus for the avowed purpose

of killing or imprisoning every Christian. He verily thought within himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the will of God. Suddenly, and without warning, Saul and his companions fell to the earth. A flash from the sky, brighter than the noon day sun, had arrested this caravan of death. Saul heard the voice of Jesus and in the city of Damascus, Ananias the preacher told him what he must do to be eternally saved. It was here that Saul heard the admonition, "Why tarriest thou, arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord!"

The devotion of Paul to the gospel of Jesus will be one of earth's greatest marvels until Judgment Day dawns. He could well say, "I am dead, but Christ liveth in me." This changed man set out to change the world. He began to preach Christ in Damascus till the city was shaken to its foundations. When later summoned before King Agrippa because of his earnest preaching, Paul said, "O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea and then to the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple and went about to kill me." Yes, what a true report that was. One night the city of Damascus had been alerted by the Governor's garrison. News spread like wild fire; news that the city gates were being guarded to apprehend Paul. What a preacher he must have been. I'm looking forward to meeting this mighty sin disturber one day in Heaven. Detectives prowled about but his close Christian friends hid him in the inner recesses of some home. They knew God had tremendous use for this flaming spirit-filled representative of the Cross. Fifty incidents in Paul's life demonstrate his utter lack of cowardice.

Before one door a raucous voice calls, "Is that fanatic here?" "Fetch out the gospelizer," cries still another voice on down the street. Perhaps this wild frenzied search went on for hours or days. Finally the blasphemous howling pursuers gain some lead to Paul's abode. The wild clamor at the front door is the result of organized violence==the type mob violence that precipitates our modern strikes where two or three engender mob spirit while half of the crowd does not even know the issue. It was a crucial moment for that band of God-fearing Christians, who knew Paul's worth to the cause of Christ. Suddenly a basket is brought. One of those normally used to raise and lower food and flowers by the city wall. The friends hurriedly fasten four ropes to the basket. Paul steps in. Few words are exchanged in the nervous tension of that moment. While Paul holds to the ropes with both

hands, his friends lower away, slowly and surely, until the apostle steps out afoot and starts on the missionary tours for Jesus; the story of which has astonished the world.

One day while writing his second letter to the Corinthians, he recalled that Damascus episode. He says in II Cor 11:33 "Through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall and escaped the governor's hands." What great and far reaching results are often dependent on some rope holder and rope maker. The fellow who twisted that cord never knew how much would depend on the strength of it. The breaking of it might have meant that the magnificent missionary work in Galatia, Cappadocia and Macedonia might never have been accomplished. The story of the resurrection of our Lord would never have been so gloriously told as Paul can tell it. Oh, how much we all matter. The seamstress, the shop' owner, the farmer, the clerk, the secretary, the housewife, all of us are so much more important to someone's destiny that we'll ever realize. There is real meaning when God's word says, "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty."

A little ship only 3 or 4 feet from stem to stern, set sail one day with a tremendous cargo. Only one passenger was aboard and perhaps he lay in a bed of leaves. Loving hands made that vessel waterproof by a coat of bitumen. See it floating yonder on the Nile! A great law giver and leader for God is there. Oh, how fragile that craft on which sailed so much of historical importance. There are no insignificant lives. The minutest things you do for God and eternity are part of someone's final victory. God has long been saying to us all, "What you do, do well." If you're going to make a rope, make it strong. If you fashion a boat, let it be waterproof for you know not who may sail in it. If you would build a bridge, be sure it is founded on solid rock for someone's soul is in the balance.

Happy is that man who has come to realize that we do not live unto ourselves. We are our Brother' keeper-----rope holders, if you please. I have often pondered that scene in Damascus. Who spun the rope? Who tied it? Who held on as the great soul winner was lowered over the wall? Imagine their reward when reports came of Paul's sweeping victories for

Jesus---- of churches planted and souls won to Heaven. In fancy I hear them talking in a little group humbly proud of their individual part in sending the gospel on and on to those who knew Him not. They were indeed
KINDRED
SPRITS---WITH KINGDOM HEARTS.

- Calvin War pula listed six things the Restoration Forum has helped accomplish ("What the Forums is Accomplishing" *One Body Spring 2002*). (1) We are learning much about each other (strengths and weaknesses). (2) We encourage joint participation in good works. (3) We emphasize unity and love as the Lord commanded. (4) We are brought out of isolation and into the open market with the people. (5) We have been forced to research and refine our positions and maybe even abandon them, as we study the Scriptures. (6) We realize that unity can exist in agreements on essentials while allowing diversity on other matters.

Marvin Phillips has cited a number of changes that have taken place since the Joplin meeting in 1984 ("The Restoration Forum: So what?" *One Body Spring 2002*). "Notably our attitude toward each other. Our openness in listening to another point of view. Our awareness that none of us are right on ALL the issues ... There has been more cooperation between churches in youth activities, teaching seminars, exchanging pulpits, joint-worship assemblies and soul winning workshops ... Preachers have been freed up to preach across lines that were forbidden before. About a third of my own preaching is to Christian Churches or joint efforts between the two groups. It is not over. We've not come as far as we need to go. Churches of Christ and Christian Churches ought to take the lead in unity and evangelism discussions all over the world."

After listening to well over 200 major addresses at Restoration Forums, Chris DeWelt had this to say: (1) We have kept the Word central. It would be very hard to argue that these meetings have not been characterized by serious study of God's Word. (2) Issues have been discussed. Yes, the issues that have divided us historically. No one has tried to skirt the difficult questions. (3) A tremendous amount of listening has occurred. The sheer amount of doctrinal messages alone would fill a sizable number of books. (4) Perhaps more attention could be given to the study of interpretation. The process of hermeneutics is necessary and extremely important to unity. (5) Attention has been given to ways in which we can and have worked together as the body of Christ.

Leroy Garrett sees Restoration Forum XX as perhaps the most significant thus far. "Restoration Forum XX, held in Lubbock, Texas in 2002 - which I attended - was historic in nature. Things happened that we could not have anticipated back at Wynnewood Chapel back in the 1950s. The Forum opened on A Sunday evening at the Broadway Church of Christ with a Communion service attended by 900 - from all three wings of our heritage. For the first time the Forum had

invited the Disciples of Christ to participate. Royce Money, president of ACU (Churches of Christ) and Bob Wetzel, president of Emmanuel School of Religion (Christian Churches) spoke on 'The Restoration Dream: The Spirit of Unity.' The singing and fellowship were breathtaking. I told Royce Money that evening that I had been waiting a half-century for such an occasion!

"The Forum continued at the Quaker Avenue Church of Christ ... with over 300 participants from all three churches. Two unusual things took place. There was a video presentation on 'Honor Roll of Unity,' conducted by Doug Foster of ACU and Victor Knowles of *One Body*. It recognized those, living and dead, who helped bring us to where we are today - pioneers in unity. I was pleased to see those honored that I not only knew but had worked with in building bridges: Perry Gresham of the Disciples of Christ; Seth Wilson, Charles Gresham, and Don DeWelt of Christian Churches; Carl Ketcherside and Tom Langford of Churches of Christ. They were gracious to include me ...

"If all that were historic enough, the Forum closed by inviting all to sign a 'Covenant of Unity,' pledging 'To be part of the answer to our Lord's prayer for unity among believers in Christ' and 'To turn away from any kind of divisive or factious spirit which is not characteristic of the spirit of Christ.'

"It was awesome to see 302 people - of diverse backgrounds - lined up to sign a pledge to be peacemakers amidst our divided people. When all this started 50 years ago, we did well to gather a handful of daring souls who ventured to shake hands and get acquainted; now I was witness to hundreds pledging themselves to do something about our tragic divisions. Wow!" (*A Lover's Quarrel*, pp. 137, 138).

We are your "ropeholders" Victor and Evelyn. We are thrilled to have had a small part in sending you around America and around the world spreading the message of UNITY. We are proud of you Victor as you have attended every Restoration Forum except one. Since Brother DeWelt died in 1991. You have helped coordinate the last 18 Forums. You also sponsored 5 unity meetings with the conservative Disciples of Christ (Disciple Renewal) in the 90s, known as the "One Body/Disciple Renewal Talks." You have been speaking at the Pepperdine University Bible Lectures since 1997. And of course you have edited every issue of ONE BODY since Don and you started it in 1984 (the same year the Restoration Forum began). You have humbly stated that you are only standing on the shoulders of giants like James DeForest Murch, Carl Ketcherside, and Don DeWelt to try and carry on the great work they did in building bridges between brethren.

Imagine with me something of the scene if we could be lifted to Heaven and visit with some of the great saints of God. As we walk the streets paved with gold we see one walk up to Victor and Evelyn and say, "Oh I am so happy to see you" And who are you? Victor inquires. "Oh I am nobody important. I lived in Poland. I was a poor Polish farmer and happened to be present the time you came to preach the Gospel in 1990. I heard and believed and obeyed the Gospel. From then on I was a faithful member of the church and

helped Kostick in his work. But it was you Victor who preached when I first heard and believed. Thank you for coming to Poland to help save my soul.

Then another saint walks up to Victor and Evelyn. So glad to meet you. And who are you saved one of God? Nobody very important. I lived in Castro's Communist Cuba. I was there in 1998 when you came with the team and preached the Gospel. I heard and believed and obeyed and was saved. I just wanted to thank you for coming to Cuba. Had it not been for you I would not have been saved.

As we stand in rapturous amazement we meet another who says "Once in a time of bitter persecution I owned a house on the walls of the city of Damascus. It was from a window in my house that the Apostle Paul was let down by the wall in a basket to go preach the Gospel. Then off in the distance we hear a voice----a strong voice as though from a saint of God, a hoarse voice that has endured many exposures-----that voice calls out

God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty and bas things of the world and things which are despised hath God chosen yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are., that no flesh should glory in his presence."

Whose is that voice? Why it's the voice of the same one who called out so long ago "Through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall."

An old man traveling a lone highway came at the evening cold and grey to a chasm deep and wide

The old man crossed in the twilight dim. The sullen stream held no fear for him. But when he was safe on the other side, he built a bridge to span the tide.

Old man, old man, said a pilgrim near. You're wasting your time with this building here. You will never again cross this way. Your journey will end with the close of day. You have crossed the chasm deep and wide, Why build you this bridge at eventide?

The builder lifted his old grey head and said, Good friend the way that I've come today there followeth after me a fair haired youth whose feet must pass this way. This stream that has been but naught to me to the fair haired youth might a pitfall be. He too must cross in the twilight dim, and so good friend I have built this bridge for him.

Victor and Evelyn, we salute you. For 15 years you have built bridges. We thank God for the privilege of being your Ropeholders. Thank you for showing us how to be **KINDRED SPIRITS WITH KINGDOM HEARTS.**