

Unremembered Loss

For all the news and information from the world of Rathrae, and for the story Unremembered Loss.

Issue 47

July 2013

The summer is half over as I write this newsletter and kids are already thinking about heading back to school. This last Sunday the sermon at church was about courage and I felt inspired to write a story in reflection of it. Since my thought have been on my own two children, I was drawn to tell a story about Brian. This is a follow up to the story I wrote in Issue 39 of the newsletter, so if you want to go back and refresh you memories of Brian, you can find it at www.douglasclarke.com

The is very much a literary story, dealing with matters of the heart, so I apologies to those of you who would like a bit more action.

To receive future issues of the newsletter sign up at <http://www.douglasclarke.com/lists>

Douglas G Clarke

Courage

I walked along the river bank aimlessly. The water gurgled in its course between the boulders, the hoots of owls and screeches of hawks echoed off the valley's walls, but I felt a heavy silence weighing down on me. My thoughts were fixated on the crowd I had been in an hour earlier - having to speak in front of them - the fear of so many looking at me.

The morning had stared like most - make breakfast, clean up, make the beds - then master call me into his study.

"Brian, I have something important for you to do today."

Those simple words put a fear into my heart.

"Important." I'm only eleven. I'm too young to do things that are important. Master does important things - adults do important things. I'm just learning what important is - what makes things important.

"You to do." I don't have any great skills, I can't even make a good breakfast if I believe Master's comments. Now he's asking me to do something that is important.

"Go see Brother Hector, he'll tell you what you need to do."

I wanted to say no, to explain that I couldn't do something important, to admit my fear, but Master was looking at me with his piercing eyes - like he was looking into my soul. I just stood there.

Then a quiet, but sturdy, voice he said, "Run on Brian, Hectors is waiting for you, You'll do fine; I have faith in you." His words gave me enough courage to move.

There was nothing for me to do but go, so I took off my apron and took my cloak from the peg by the door and stepped into the unknown beyond the safety of my home. My heart beat fast as I walked down the early morning street, only a pair of cats looking for their breakfast to distract me from my fears - I was glad for their distraction.

I found Brother Hector sitting in the courtyard of the abbey. He looked up from his reading as I approached. "Greetings Brian. Beautiful morning, isn't it?"

I stopped and tried to find my voice, but only a squeak left my mouth as I tried to greet him.

"Breath, Brian. Take a moment and try to relax."

I closed my eyes and berated myself for being such a cowered, but I took a few deep breathes and the pounding of my heart left my ears. "I'm sorry Brother Hector, I didn't mean greet you like a crow. Master said you had something for me to do."

"True enough, but first the morning. Do you agree that it is beautiful?"

I looked at my feet, then up to the blooms of the trees and the crystal blue sky beyond.

"Yes. It is a beautiful morning."

"Close you eyes."

I did as Brother Hector said.

"Is it a beautiful morning?"

In the blackness of my own mind, I tried to figure out what Brother Hector was asking. As I waited for him to say something else I started to notice the singing of the birds, the rustling of the leaves on the near by tree, and also the aroma of the blossoms and the tang of a nearby patch of mint.

“Yes,” I said with more confidence, “It is a beautiful morning.”

“Why?”

Why? What did that mean? Why is it a beautiful morning? I didn't know way. I didn't know what to think. I said the only thing that came to my mind, the thing that was the opposite of what I was feeling.

“It's peaceful.”

“A good answer, however the look on your face tells me that you are not feeling at peace this morning.”

I opened my eyes and looked in Brother Hector's.

“I'm afraid.”

“Afraid of what might be?”

“Yes. Of failing, of letting Master down.”

“I see...” There was a gentle smile on his lips, a softness to his eyes - like he was lost in a memory. “and how much more afraid will you be in the 'now' when you have to do the thing you are only imaging now?”

If he was trying to calm me down, it wasn't working. I could hear my heart pounding again in my ears, could feel my chest tightening. I squeaked out “More.”

“It is a beautiful morning. God's peace is resting on this place. Feel his presence and let in calm you.”

As Brother Hector talked, I felt my fear flow away...

“God is doing a new thing and we are part it. Do you believe that God might choose to use you as part of his plan? That he is strong enough to do mighty things even if you we weak?”

... and a courage took hold of me...

“That he can keep you from failing?”

... I looked at the trees, the birds, the lowly mint plant, and a peace filled me. I smiled a Brother Hector.

“Yes,” was all I could find words for.

“Good, now remember this peace - this peace that came to you in your fear. Later, when you are afraid, remember his peace. Now take this note and go to the parade grounds by the palace. When the time comes you'll know it.”

I wanted to ask more questions, but Brother Hector stood and walked away. I sat on the bench for a while, wanting to read the note, but not daring to. Dreading what might be coming, but remembering Brother Hector's words and trying to find peace. As the church bells filled the courtyard with their ringing I stood and walk towards my destiny.

When I reached the parade grounds they were empty. To one side was a wooden stage where those accused of crimes are brought before the people. I sat under a tree and dreaded what might be coming, but I prayed for peace and God was kind. I sat for three hours, thinking of going home, but knowing I had to stay. Then they started to come. One or two at first, then by the dozens. Soon there were five hundred or more people filling the grounds.

The voices of the crowd filled the air, growing ever louder as more people came. Then suddenly a hush washed across the crowd and the foot steps of the town guards marching was the only sound. I stood up and watched 12 guards march to the stage, and amongst them, two boys.

I climbed the tree so I could get a better view and watched as the procession stopped on the stage, the twelve guards half circling the two boys who stood in the front. The guard on the far right spoke.

“Before you stand two boys. This is not the first time they have been here, but it may be the last.”

The two boy visibly shook under the eyes of the townsfolk.

“In the past the behavior of Jasper and Bruce has been excused as the misdeeds of youth, of young boys' excess energy and struggles to become men. Today their offense is greater and not so easily overlooked and we must ask the question, can they turn from the path they have started down, or are they lost to us.”

A murmuring rose from the crowd. Several of the people yelled out above the others, recalling how either Jasper or Bruce had wronger them or stolen from them. The guard let the crowd talk for several minutes before silencing it.

“The damaged caused by these two boys has been set at 100 pieces of silver. They have admitted to doing the damage and their families to not have the money to make restitution. Unless someone will step forward and pay for their damages they will be sent to the city to work off their debt.”

The crowd was deathly silence.

“Will anyone step forward?”

In the silence a voice cried out in my head that now was the time. I didn't want to listen to the voice. I was afraid to listen, but then I remembered Hector's encouragement - remember the mornings peace. I pulled the note from my pocket. I unfolded it and read the eight word there. "Remember when I saved you from Jasper and Bruce."

My heart stopped as I remembered how they had bullied me. How for weeks they had pushed me, taken my coins, and called me names.

How much I had hated them. Then I thought, "They are getting what they deserve," but quickly the middle words of the note hit me, "How I saved you." Hector had stepped in and with a singled sentence had ended their torment of me. He had said, "Honor those who are over you, less your days be short," then he told them who my master was. That was the last time they had ever bullied me.

Now they were going to be sent away to work off their debt and I was the only one who could say anything that might help them. I dropped out of the tree and started walking through the crowd towards the stage, and with every step my fear grew. What was I thinking, what was I going to say, what could I say that would make any difference?

With every step the fear grew, but with every breath new peace flowed over me. I don't remember reaching the stage or climbing onto it. I don't remember what I said to the guard, but she motioned for me to speak to the crowd. As I stood there looking for words, my eyes glanced from face to face. Each expectant. Each knowing the outcome, but willing to give me my say.

The first words came out as a squeak as my body trembled, but somehow in saying those first words I found courage. I took a deep breath and started again.

"I know a little about the things that Bruce and Jasper have done; for several months I was the target. They bullied me, stole my money, and made my life pretty miserable."

Several in the crowd murmured their agreement and disapproval of the boys. I felt my chest tighten again. I didn't know how to say what I need to convey, but I knew I needed to keep going or I'd never start again.

"They're beyond hope. That's what I thought, but then one day that thought changed. They were in the middle of stealing my candy when a friend of mine told them who my master was. They changed in that instance. Since that day, they have not bothered me; not even once. I know now that they are not beyond hope. It may have been fear that changed them, but I saw them change."

I saw blank faces looking at me from the crowd. I could see they didn't understand - that some didn't agree. But I believed my words and I saw that I could make a difference - that gave me the courage to keep going.

"I believe that they are not beyond hope, and I believe that there is something even more powerful than fear. My friend saved me from these two boys."

I tuned and looked at Jasper and Bruce. Their eyes were down cast.

"Are you beyond hope?" I asked them.

They shook their heads, "no."

I looked back at the crowd - everyone was looking at me. I went on.

"I see hope. I see change through the power of love. God is making all things new, and I believe that he will make these boys new, but I have to take the first step."

I reached into my cloak pocket and pulled out my coin purse.

"I have only seven tarnished copper pieces. I know it isn't enough to pay their debt - it's hardly enough to make a start, but to me it is a lot. It's all the money I have, but it's not all I have - I have love - and I know it's not all this town has - God's love fills this place. Will you join me in believing that our love can change Jasper and Bruce?"

I stepped off the stage and handed my coin purse to a man standing there. I walked slowly through the crowd, my body trembling. I left them behind - that square full of people - wondering if my seven copper pieces made any difference at all. I walked down the hill and out the front gates of the town. I walked up the river - not know where I was going.

And now I'm here. The place I didn't know I was going. The place where my life changed - where it ended and started. Just another wide spot in the river - just before some rapids - where my father used to fish. The place where we used to sit and talk - where he taught me the value of love, the value of thankfulness even though we were poor, the value of people.

I stared into the water that took my father's life and I wondered if my father would have approved of what I did today - of my giving away three weeks of my savings to help to boys who used to torment me. But then I stopped wondering, because I knew that it was my father's love that had taught me to have the courage to do the things I knew were right.

I tossed a stone into the river - watching the ripples rush down stream - and then I walked back to town.