

Archive for February, 2010

February 19th, 2010

Walking through the valley of the Shadow of Life

We are familiar with the twenty third psalm and the comforting words of "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me". Most of us, because of our faith, don't really fear death. Also, we don't fear death because it is a far away concept. Teenagers feel immortal and most of us don't feel much older than we did then. We also work with young children and the specter of death is unfamiliar. Their parents are young and most of our colleagues are young. Young is a relative concept. To sixty year olds, everybody is young; to twenty year olds the rest of us are old (and some are older than dirt!)

Our challenge is not with the shadow of death but the shadow of life – the shadow of all of those things that block out the sun (or is that Son?). We are challenged by our vision of reality or rather the way things are supposed to be (no shadows). We look around us and see hurting people – some hurting physically, some emotionally and mentally and many now hurting financially – and it casts a shadow. When we are young we think there should be only sunshine – no clouds, no rain to mar our picnics and pursuits. The absolutely blue sky that extends from horizon to horizon gives way to shadows. Sometimes the clouds are high and far away and don't cast large shadows. At other times they populate the sky like large sailing ships. And when all you can see are clouds – there is no sun (at least on our side of the clouds.) And there aren't even any shadows because the whole world has gone gray. Sometimes that cloud covering is dark and threatening. And it sends cold rains that dampen not only our bodies but our spirits. And when the clouds descend all the way to earth we get lost in the fog. Lost! And that great dazzle of winter that frosts the earth and transforms all of life into a wonderland also comes from those same clouds.

Without the shadow of the clouds we might never appreciate the warmth of the sun. Without the clouds we might take every sunny day (and blessing) for granted. It is not death we fear but the shadows of life – pain, disappointment, betrayal, loss. And yet we need to remember the words of the psalmist – "I will fear no evil, for you are with me." It takes courage to live in both sunshine and shadow.

Ultimately, we have to be reminded that the most memorable and brilliant sunsets are framed and possible because of the clouds of life – often the very ones that have caused the shadows of our day but now portray the glory of God's magnificent sunset and the masterpiece that He makes of our lives. "I will not fear the shadow of life!"

February 17th, 2010

What I wish I knew before I started Part 4

Putting things away

Putting things away is even more important than getting them out. Life is a different kind of three period lesson all of its own. Anticipation, Discovery, Reality. You see it in the classroom and you experience it in life. (In the classroom) First, you have the anticipation of a new lesson. Then you have the joy of discovery of what the lesson offers. Finally, you have the reality of having to put it away. Reality is always changing because it has different parts to it. One reality in the classroom is that I don't want to put it away because I am still enjoying working with it. A second reality of the classroom is that I may be tired from the exertion – both physical and mental – and I don't want to put it away. A third reality is that I may have wrung out every bit of flavor from the exercise (like old gum) and now I'm bored with it and would rather not finish but move on to other more exciting things.

Helping our children put things away with the same attention to care and detail is a life lesson. Many of us start projects and make progress – but it is in finishing that we often fall short. In the classroom, it is getting the last drop of water dried from practical life; it is making sure all of the golden beads are in their own special place. It is the care with which we finish the task that ultimately determines if the task has been done successfully.

The next time you give a presentation make sure the constructive triangles (or anything else) go back in the box as carefully as they were retrieved. It is a life lesson of reality that success goes to who finishes – not who starts.