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Commentary — From the Margins

The Harm of a Warning

Originally posted November 2007

During the upcoming Winter Break, Willamette University will be removing the trees to the northwest of the Beta Theta Pi Chapter House in order to make way for the new Ford Academic Hall. One of the trees that will be removed is the Richard E. Kerr Tree, sometimes referred fondly as “the sketch tree.” Few know, however, that the tree was planted in memory of a Beta pledge who lost his life during a pledge trip to the coast. (from the 'G chapter of #1A at Willamette University's website)

The 2007 posting on Gamma Sigma chapter of Beta Theta Pi at Salem, Oregon's Willamette University website has a short statement from Richard (Dick) Kerr's fiancé and an equally short statement from another pledge about Dick's death ... Dick was my roommate fall 1963. Contrary to the statement of the other pledge about Dick living in Baxter, Dick lived in Matthews Hall, practiced playing his saxophone on the roof outside our doom room window, and was looking forward to moving into the frat house when he, along with other pledges, journeyed to the Coast—not for “play time” as his fiancé writes—for some frat hazing: running on the beach in the dark of the night.

For the past 45 years I have remembered Dick every once in a while, usually a passing thought, a remembering of that fall when Mom committed suicide and my brothers went to live with aunts and my sisters with a cousin—when my world was defined by death. I hadn't thought much about Dick until a student wrote a paper about how lowering the drinking age would save the lives of college students. My student used the example of an underage student who died from alcohol poisoning after an incident of frat hazing, and I made comments in the margins of my student's paper that lowering the drinking age would not necessarily eliminate deaths during hazing. Momentarily, while writing those comments, I couldn't remember Dick's first name so I did what technology now allows: I Googled Dick, and using the search term “Kerr + Willamette University,” I found that even the tree planted as a living memorial to him has passed from this world.

The night that Dick told me that he was off to the Coast (where I was from), that he didn't know what would happen but that other pledges were also going—he knew hazing of some sort would be involved—I told him to be careful, that every winter some few people were killed by rolling logs (by logs lifted by the high wave of a series and rolled back into the

surf), that if he was chased by a wave and had to jump atop a log to keep from getting soaked, “Be careful if the wave lifts the log that you aren’t thrown off the log on the surf side, for the log tends to roll back down the beach, rolling over people.” I told him that he wanted to be on the uphill side of the log, that if he felt the log lift he needed to jump off it and get up the beach.

The advice was common sense. After all, during my high school years I spent a few nights on the beach hunting for glass floats, and a lot more days. On the same beach where Dick was killed, Percy Calkins and I had, at dawn on one winter weekend day, wallowed through foam (scud) above our waists in search of glass floats: we didn’t know much about rip tides other than we knew enough to stay out of them. That beach was known for its sneaker waves, but this knowledge was really limited to those coastal residents who hunted agates or hunted glass floats after winter storms. So I felt the need to warn Dick about the dangers of being on that beach in the middle of the night.

It was, perhaps, my warning that got Dick killed; for indeed, a wave chased the pledges onto a large driftwood log, then lifted the log, throwing three (I thought four) pledges into the surf where the log should have rolled over them, what happened all too often before the Governor, a few years later, ordered the Highway Department to buck driftwood logs into firewood. But the log continued to lift that fateful night and Dick had jumped off on the uphill side of the log.

I doubt that the other pledges will ever know how lucky they were that the log didn’t do what most logs did when lifted by a wave; I doubt that these pledges have ever considered that because the wave was a sneaker, a wave far larger than other waves, a wave large enough to lift the log and set it far up the beach instead of rolling it back into the surf, they are alive and Dick isn’t, assuming that they are still alive.

Would it have been better not to have said anything to Dick about the danger present in what he intended to do; i.e., be on the beach in the middle of the night? Most likely if I had said nothing, he too would have been thrown off the log and into the surf, and would have lived because the roll came to rest far up the beach.

The above question has, for decades, made me hesitant to warn about this or that. When is the warning and action taken because of the warning the cause of death? When is a warning about something that could happen but doesn’t the cause of disbelief? When is the watchman a Peter crying, “Wolf, wolf”?

For too long, Christian watchmen have cried wolf, wolf, warning an unbelieving world that Christ Jesus will return at any moment—and that has not been the case. Christ will not come until after “the man of lawlessness [sin] is revealed” (2 Thess 2:3), and the man of sin (man of perdition) will not be revealed until after the second Passover liberation of Israel, for no great falling away [rebellion] can occur on a day when Christendom isn’t one with Christ.

Far too much attention was placed on Y2K, and is now placed on December 21, 2012, most likely the day when the sixth seal is opened if the second Passover occurs in 2011 ... in the midst of the Great Depression, the LDS prophet in Salt Lake City warned members of this sect that they should put away at least a year's worth of everything these members would need, from food to toiletries to laundry soap. Since then, this sect has developed plans to leverage food into discipleship, for their Joseph has warned them as Joseph warned Pharaoh about the seven fat years followed by seven lean years. In a way, America's obesity problem (now a worldwide problem) has unconsciously prepared this nation to resist attempts of leveraging food into discipleship: the plenty of "seven" (or more) fat years is stored not in Pharaoh's granaries but around the waists of Wal-Mart shoppers. [The seven lean years will be the Tribulation and the Endurance.]

What I have come to realize is that the ongoing historical record of the endtime Church is a self-aware text, meaning that this era now knows that it is the shadow and type, the left hand enantiomer, of genuine disciples during the seven endtime years of tribulation; that disciples in this era will do at a lower hierarchal level those things that empowered saints will do after the second Passover, including rebelling against God by returning to sin as a dog returns to its vomit. Thus, "food" in this era represents primarily those items that a person eats, with a secondary meaning of food being knowledge, especially knowledge of God. But when "food" is raised a hierarchal level, the order of importance is reversed: food will primarily represent knowledge of God. When raised one more level (when disciples are glorified), disciples are food; they are the reality of the two loaves of bread waved on the Feast of Weeks (Lev 23:17).

The problem for disciples inherent with stockpiling food as Joseph had Pharaoh do is that these disciples will begin to trust in the labor of their hands rather than in God ... warning disciples about the impending disaster sure to befall this nation will, most likely, cause disciples to act physically and will, I fear, created a scenario like that which saw Dick Kerr jump off the log on its uphill side. No disciple can "protect" a stockpile of foodstuffs as lawless survivalists intend to protect their caches. Every disciple will have to rely up God to make the little bit of flour left in the barrel and the last drops of oil last as they did for the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:12-17). So it does disciples no good spiritually to warn them about impending famines and economic crises if these warnings cause them to stockpile foodstuffs, then trust in those things that are stockpiled, or if their warehoused foodstuffs get these disciples killed by looters.

The question becomes, how much warning should be given considering that for genuine disciples "food" in this era will equate to knowledge of God during the Endurance? But stockpiling foodstuffs in this era will most likely cause the physical or spiritual death of these disciples once the Tribulation begins.

If I had to do it over again, would I warn Dick about the danger of being thrown into the surf from a log? I really don't know. My instincts say that, yes, I would, but if a person knows what the future will hold for another person and if the person discloses this knowledge to the other and if the other takes action to prevent what is sure to happen, will

the action taken to prevent the inevitable turn out to be the cause of the inevitable occurring? To warn or not to warn will, thus, produce the same “inevitable” outcome, making the warning pointless.

Or is warning pointless? The Lord tells the prophet Ezekiel,

If I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them, and make him their watchman, and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people, then if anyone who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet and did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that person is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand. (33:2–6)

The warning really isn't for those being warned, but for the one who warns.

The above passage pertains primarily to warning Israel (now the Church) to repent, but it can be applied more broadly—and if applied in a broader sense, the warning must be twofold: (1) do not trust in the things of this world, including in physical abilities, for life and the maintenance of life during the Tribulation and Endurance, but rather, trust in God, even if that means losing physical life. The second (2) warning is more mundane: if a person knows that there will be famine striking not just the now hungriest parts of this world but the entirety of the world, then it would behoove the person to prepare for a time when foodstuffs cannot be purchased. God is well able to supply the needs of the disciple, but when a warning has been given and not heeded, the person can expect God to be a little slow in covering the disciple's indolence, with this slowness translating in extended hunger pains.

Because disciples form a self-aware text, and because physical food in this era equates with spiritual food when disciples are liberated from indwelling sin and death, some reasonable provisions should be made for when food cannot be purchased (the shadow for spiritually when there is a famine of the word). These provisions should not cause the disciple to trust in them; they should not break budgets and placed undo burdens on families. But it probably would be wise to return to Victory Garden mentalities, where a person rediscovers Depression and WW2 era home food production and storage possibilities. Beyond this, I am extremely reluctant to go; for when I lived along the Oregon Coast and in Alaska I became acquainted with many “survivalists,” men who by force of arms and years of preparation intended to defend those things they regarded as theirs. I know how easy it is for a mind to be preoccupied by the physical things of this world, and I know how far this mentality will take a person from God. But with those disclaimers in the foreground, let it here be said that a disciple should quietly begin to provide for the disciple's needs at a

future time when there is little to purchase and nothing the disciple can afford.

It used to be that a person harvested during the summer and fall and stored foodstuffs on the person's premises that would last the person through the winter and spring; it used to be that the person didn't go to the store every few days to buy foodstuffs. And a return to this rural mindset will cause the disciple to do in a less formal way what Latter Day Saints do in storing a year's worth of needs.

But storing foods that the disciple doesn't know how to prepare or want to eat does little good: what's needed is a changed mentality about food, and a return to the basics. The disciple should know what is available to eat in the person's locale that isn't traded as a commodity, meaning a little knowledge about edible weeds is probably desirable. And certainly knowledge about (and experience with) cooking basic foodstuffs received in their unprepared state would be helpful, as well as having the pots and pans necessary for preparing basic foods.

Food is not a commodity! Wheat, corn, soybeans, coffee beans are commodities, but those things that a person can eat are more diverse than what is traded in Chicago.

Dick Kerr was a good guy, a good saxophone player, a friend from the foothills of Southern California—and in the middle of a stormy night, on a beach of my youth, he died while trying to heed a warning I had given him. During the Tribulation (the first 1260 days of the seven endtime years), genuine disciples will be killed for the foodstuffs they have stored on their premises. But more genuine disciples will be killed because of the knowledge they have acquired, knowledge coming from me having been called to reread prophecy. There is no escaping the reality that others will die prematurely because of words I have written, but the question must now be raised, is any of this unknown to God?