

MARK'S REMARKS

The entire journey began without looking at a map but I soon discovered I was and would continue to be lost without following the Map. Once I began seeing the Map as a Guide and not as a limitation, I found myself traveling by days of bright Sun, nights of glorious stars and much like any trip, days of humid wind intermixed with occasional storm clouds. But I continued to follow the Map and found myself unpacking in a small rural town. As I settled into these new surroundings, I began walking. And in the shadow of store fronts, in parks and with elbows resting on café tables, I encountered kindness, encouragement, prayer, love, strength, and friendship. It seemed we had met before but this time it seemed more powerful, more vigorous. Some days I would spend much of the day strolling alone only to turn a corner and discover a previous acquaintance. As we talked and reminisced, we both felt humbled by how we 'accidentally' met again.

As I continued to walk and meet the life of this rural town, the conversations became longer, more trusting, depth replacing the cordial. It was in these moments I began to discover their joys, dreams, pains, and in some instances their confusion and frustrations. We talked of the mystery of death, the brilliance of life, the emptiness left by the absence of a loved one, the completeness found in a marriage, the responsibility realized in a birth. We talked of family and friends, corn and beans, metal and fabrication, cattle and hogs, sheep and the Shepherd. It appeared some had been following the Map for decades, some still had not discovered the Map, others still saw the map as restrictive. I was particularly appreciative of those sharing the vast difference in a journey with and without the Map, much like my own travels.

I found myself reflecting and pondering the wonder, the mystery, the heartbreak, and the diversity of life. In the stillness of the night, I began to hear a heartbeat, actually two. One being the heartbeat of a collection of souls that have made this small spot on the world map their home. A place to raise children, seek gainful employment, a place to dream. A location where one could walk in parades, cheer at tractor pulls, and support the home team; a community where an increasing number have laid claim as the place to live and a place to be laid to rest. The other heartbeat I realized was mine. Although it had always been consistently and rhythmically pumping, it was as if I hadn't noticed. Excitement began to replace dullness, awareness began to replace apathy. I knew arriving at this destination was no accident. This meeting had been planned since the pillars of the earth were put in place.

It has been one year since arriving in Rock Valley. As I sit here this afternoon, I wonder how many pastors know they are loved and appreciated. I wonder how many are content with where God has them serving. I wonder how many are grateful for the opportunities to share the Good News. Well, I know there is at least one. Thank you for a wonderful first year of ministry. Your words and actions of love are an inspiration and an answer to prayer!

Walking Together,

Pastor Mark

Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it (Isaiah 30:21).