

DECORAH COVENANT CHURCH



Update from Pastor Don Holmertz October 2010

To our church families in Stillman Valley and Decorah:

The last few weeks I've felt a lot like George Clooney.

Not George Clooney the movie star, a cool action hero and ladies' man, but the homeless guy George Clooney plays in a recent movie. His homelessness isn't so obvious, however. He has a small, spartan apartment that he goes to once in a while, but he lives on the road. His "home" is airports, rental cars, hotels, and airplanes....and he's fine with all of it. He finds predictability and familiarity in places and things that most travelers see as necessary evils. The title of the movie is Up in the Air. There is plenty of irony: He travels all the time because he is hired by corporations to go to personally fire people....a professional downsizer who puts people "up in the air." He meets and falls in love with a woman who appears to be just as "homeless" as he is, but (spoiler alert) appearances can be deceiving. His situation is brought into sharp contrast when a family wedding brings him back to his hometown and he tries to fit in with siblings, who all have, more or less, a conventional notion of home and roots.

How many clichés can I pile up to describe what Deanne and I have been doing these days?

"Wrapping things up", "saying goodbye", "starting a new chapter", "living by faith, not by sight", "grieving our losses", "reconnecting with one another", and of course, being "up in the air".

Even the joy of coming home after traveling is a mixed blessing when the home has a *For Sale* sign out front.

We can also pile up the things we know:

- We're not alone...lots of others are going through similar passages.
- Some people live "up in the air" all their lives: characters in scripture and history, the missionaries whose prayer letters we got last week, and many people in the communities we're coming from and going to.
- Our #1 task is to be thankful.
- This is the kind of place where God does his best work.
- To be alive is to lose.

So these ideas are swimming around in my head and are the focus of my reading, praying, and journaling. In fact, one of the main themes of the retreat center we were at in Colorado was allowing God to help process our losses.

From this perspective of being up in the air, we can see the big and little divine interventions that are guiding, blessing, enriching, and encouraging us. God kept us safe in our travels and opened doors, worked out schedules and details, and helped us to discover things about ourselves that we didn't have a clue about. We have engaged all kinds of family and friends, been on the "Loneliest Road in America" (Hwy 50 across Nevada) and the place "Where Dreams Come True" (Walt Disney World). We cried and prayed with friends in California whose daughter died of cancer in the spring and celebrated as a cousin's daughter was married in Orlando.

All along we are thankful for the folks in Decorah and Stillman Valley for giving us the time and the freedom of these days to catch our spiritual breath, to be on the road, and to pursue the necessary tasks for a smooth transition.

So learning about faith, growing in grace and letting go, etc., in the middle of loss and transition is nothing new. The real challenge of the Christian life (and this is nothing new, either) is to live all the time like that: to make letting go a spiritual discipline and daily reality rather than an unwelcome guest, even when we are in a season of life where we are “settled” and have “enough” (two notoriously relative words). Building intentional uncertainty into our lives might look like this: prayer, fasting, giving, service, and loving people to their one step towards Jesus. It is counterintuitive to the stable familiarity most of us desire, but it is the path that Jesus walked, and He says, you may remember, “Follow Me.”

We could also pile up scriptures to illuminate that path. In exhorting his readers to live a set-apart lifestyle, Peter calls them “aliens and strangers” (2 Peter 2:11). Jesus culls the field of would-be disciples by saying that “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).

So at this writing we don’t know when the house will sell, or where we will live in Decorah, even for the short term. But whenever or wherever we settle, and when I’m no longer feeling like George Clooney’s character, we pray that the important lessons of our season “up in the air” aren’t lost in the shuffle, and we can say “Yes” to Jesus’ daily call to intentional uncertainty.

Pastor Don