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by Mark Brunner

“Worth The Wait!” (Romans 8: 22-25)

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When I was growing up in rural Waukesha County, my sense of equality and fair play was finely honed as I interacted with a group of boys all competing for the same bike path, fishing stream, and climbing tree. “Ownership” of these resources usually belonged to the fastest, strongest, and without a doubt, the oldest. The fields when not occupied by cattle belonged to our imaginary army. For the most part, our gang of ten to 12-year-olds were an occupying force. If there was a field to scout, we were there. The signs of our presence were everywhere.

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As time went on and we grew up, and our “elite unit” began to disband. We occupied the dugout for a few years, but, as girls and cars began to attract our attention, the day finally came when we no longer crawled through its makeshift door. That’s when a new a new “elite unit” formed consisting of those ten and eleven year old recruits that used to follow us into every battle. Seeing their opportunity, they seized the fort unworthy though they were to hold it. They had not used hours of their precious time to design it or to gather up the necessary beams and planks. The fort passed on to those who did not deserve it. Years later, high school nearly over, I revisited the old fort. I crawled in and found myself a bit cramped for space; having added nearly a foot in length to my lanky frame. It was a good feeling and I could almost feel those walls exclaiming, “The one who made us has returned. See, it was worth the wait after all!”

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“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34)

“This Is Nifty!” (Psalms 66: 1-20)

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do with His power; it is really what He hasn't done that leaves me breathless. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

Here's a story. A young boy traveling by airplane to visit his grandparents sat beside a man who happened to be a seminary professor. The boy was reading a Sunday school take-home paper when the professor thought he would have some fun with the lad. "Young man," said the professor, "If you can tell me something God can do, I'll give you a big, shiny apple." The boy thought for a moment and then replied, "Mister, if you can tell me something God can't do, I'll give you a whole barrel of apples!"

As I was growing up, perhaps the "niftiest" thing that I understood about God wasn't His great wisdom, or even His unbounded love. Sure, I had been taught that there was no one or nothing in this world that was smarter than God. Fact is, whenever something went really wrong in my life, my Dad had all the wisdom I needed, and I got unbounded love from my Mother. But, to a boy of ten, the fact that God was strong seemed far more important as I was striving to be the fastest, strongest, and smartest kid on the block. Strength was the key to survival in my world and that's what impressed me the most about God; He was so powerful. Wisdom seemed like something that would come in handy later in life. And love? Well, let's just say that was something for girls. I really didn't understand clearly what omnipresence meant, so that didn't register on my wish list much. But all power? Now that would be really nifty! That big kid who picked on me? Toast! And being able to break through the line over tackle? They'd never see me coming! Typically, power to a ten year old boy was something pretty self-defining and absolutely self-perpetuating.

It would be years before I understood the real meaning of an all-powerful God. His power resides and is most effective in what He created not in what He deems to do to it. He is glorified not in His power over His creation but in His authority through it. God uses His power to continually build and perfect. True power, omnipotence, acts as a curb to itself. It's like trying to square a circle. There are some things that God's power prevents Him from doing because these are not perfected in His power. Power in the hands of the Almighty God can only lead to perfection.

God's power through His creation is absolutely awesome. When we look around at this marvelous world filled with so many remarkable creations, there can be no doubt in our minds that perfection lies behind every blade of grass, every drop of water, every handful of cool, rich earth. Our awesome, all-powerful God has seen to it that nothing has been missed and no detail left out. You know, what really seems nifty about the whole thing now, isn't so much what God is able to do with His power; it is really what He hasn't done that leaves me breathless. Now, that is truly nifty!

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“Mark Of A True Craftsman!” (Colossians 1:15-20)

God separates Himself from all manmade creation as the only Creator capable of fashioning out of nothing, something truly exquisite and beautiful. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

Over the years I have made other pieces of furniture. Nevertheless, my “crafting” was rude at best. If you look closely at any of these pieces you will see obvious flaws, the result of inexperience, improper tooling, wrong choices, and carelessness. Any one of these errors could cause my work to be cast as amateurish at best. But even these errors don't truly separate my craftsmanship from that of a friend of mine who is a very skilled woodworker. Although he makes few of the errors that are apparent in my work, the lack of these errors isn't primarily really what separates his work from mine.

My friend builds grandfather clocks, complete dining room sets, elaborate bedsteads and entire collections of cute wooden toys. But even these more grandiose creations don't separate the “men from the boys” so to speak. No, it's not the product of his work that truly marks him as a fine craftsman. Rather it is one very important difference that makes my work outside of his class. He literally is able to make something out of nothing! I have seen him take a piece of rough hewn walnut, replete with knots, twists, and reverse grains and craft something beautiful from it. His great patience and an innate ability to be

able to see into the wood something that isn't there yet but will be is what makes him a fine craftsman. Ultimately, it isn't even the lack of flaws that eventually separates his work from mine. It is something far less apparent but far more impacting than mere error. A great craftsman puts himself into every piece of work he produces. It starts when virgin wood meets rough hands and is consummated when the wood has become something much beyond its original promise, glowing under the tender strokes of the finishing cloth. There is now a union between creator and the created, one that can only result from the love of one who fashions another into something exquisitely beautiful.

In such a way God separates Himself from all manmade creation as the only Creator capable of fashioning out of nothing, something truly exquisite and beautiful. Whereas we humbly ply our skills with imperfect hands and hearts, God created all things from a state of eternal perfection that dwells within His being. Think about it, this world is perfect! There is no flaw in its creation; no gaps, drips, or unsightly scratches. When our Creator God was finished with His handiwork, he declared it good. Nothing imperfect can stand in His sight. It can't be any other way for God, the Eternal Craftsman of all things good and perfect, started with virgin material, His Holy Word, and crafted from it something of great promise, you and I. When He was finished, there existed a union, an eternal bond between Creator and the created which could never be broken, even when sin intervened. What an eternal comfort it is to know that He is in us and we in Him. The mark of a true craftsman, our Heavenly Father.

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“Stay The Course!” (Romans 6: 19-23)

If you want a body that is truly free, try putting it to work in the Lord's vineyard. Nothing disciplines the sinful desires of the flesh like putting it in service to others! My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

Here's a thought from Richard Foster in his book, *Celebration of Discipline*. "Despite the fact that President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 freeing all slaves in the south, most of them didn't feel free. Even though they knew that they didn't serve their southern masters any more, they also knew that they would have to work hard in order to turn centuries of slavery into freedom. Many black men enlisted in the Union army and entire black companies and brigades were formed. They fought valiantly at places like Fort Donald, Vicksburg, and Union Station. Many died. But, by the end of the war, these valiant soldiers had done much to convince skeptical Union troops that not only were they battle worthy, they were freedom worthy. Although life in the North remained difficult for many blacks following the war, one thing was certain; that the road to true freedom lay in front of them. All they needed to do now was to stay the course.

In this world of sin as we are slaves to every evil thing, it's hard for a Christian to experience the freedom that God has granted us through His Son, Jesus Christ. There is that "small" matter of our bodies. Christ has freed us from our slavery. Yet, the world doesn't recognize that freedom. It strives to enslave us all over again. What then is the key to staying the path that will lead us away from slavery and into true freedom? Author Richard Foster writes. "Nothing disciplines the evil desires of the flesh like service, and nothing transforms the desires of the flesh like serving in quiet. Our body whines against public service but screams against quiet service. But, if we earnestly refuse to give in to this lust of the flesh, we crucify it. Every time we crucify the flesh, we crucify our pride and arrogance. This is where true freedom reigns; when we acknowledge Christ's perfectness and our imperfection." (Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* p.114 & 130)

The secret to being free in our bodies, and staying free, is doing just what those black soldiers did back in 1863. They knew that the road to freedom was more than just beautiful words on a document telling others that they were free. They knew that it would take a lot of hard work, discipline, devotion to service and committed devotion to abiding in the meaning of that document to bring about real freedom. In like manner, you and I need to devote ourselves to service. Every battle that we fight, every hard and weary mile that we walk is one more step toward putting down the flesh and bringing it into subjection. If you want

a body that is truly free, try putting it to work in the Lord's vineyard. "Nothing disciplines the sinful desires of the flesh like putting it in service to others!"

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