

November 2011 Rhodes Report

***Do my readers overlook the camp ministry of our Lord?***

It's an individual question, but the answer is often “Yes!” In fact, we might better ask “Why?” rather than “If!” Does it help put things in context if I use other terms for camp ministry--phrases like “Secluded Retreat”, “Rural Ministry”, or “Wilderness Revival Program”? And I might as well throw in my private complaint: cities get all the attention. Yes, church congregations are impressed when a missionary touts the massive size of the city he seeks to evangelize. Bigger seems better. “You got to go where the fish are!” gushes the missions' neophyte. “The larger the school of fish, the greater the work of God!” (Well, I haven't actually heard that last expression, but we certainly tend to think that way.) Yet, I find no such pattern in scripture. In fact, Jesus regularly sought remote countryside. Accounts of his rural retreat and ministry frequent the gospels. The incidents are so important they are related repeatedly. Piece together the chronology which begins in Mark 6, Luke 9, or Matthew 14. The 12 apostles had just returned from a dramatic evangelistic tour after having traversed the country. At the conclusion of their missions report, Jesus implores them to “come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile” (Mk 6:31). Accordingly, they escape to the wilderness, but soon find their retreat interrupted. The teaching and feeding of over 5000 follows (Mk 6:44), then solitude is again sought. In the companion passage of Lu 9, we find Jesus alone after the 5000 feeding, praying with his disciples (vs 18). Days later he withdraws to a mountain with three intimate disciples, and it is there we read of his transfiguration. In Matthew 15 we find him retreating to a mountain once again where prayerful retreat is interrupted again, punctuated now by the feeding of another 4000. And, do not forget his last hours of freedom spent in the restive seclusion of the Garden of Gethsemane. I could go on. In fact, after his resurrection, he appeared to country travelers (Lu 24:15) and later chose to accost and convert Saul on a lonely stretch of road (Acts 9:3). The risen Lord seems to shun large crowds and urban settings. Call camp ministry by any name you wish, but rural ministry deserves a prominent place in Christian affection and practice.

***Could you feed 5000 at Gila Christian Ranch?***

No. Jesus may have fed over 5000 at his camp (Shall we name it “Feed the Hungry Baptist Camp”?) but our cooks might strike if I told them we were having 5000 guests for dinner at Gila Christian Ranch! Not to worry. God seems to have called us to a much smaller, more intimate ministry. Remember, size doesn't prove value. Winning souls and changing lives occurs one-by-one. It is a hard-fought process whose success is measured over time--not by volume of initial audience. You've probably noticed most scripture accounts of ministry success entail individual testimonies—not vaguely described mass movements! What excites followers of our camp ministry here in the setting of the Gila National Forest is the remarkable reports of individual, precious souls—decisions made, lives changed—accounts unheard-of from secular social programs.

How can we help?

I thought you'd never ask! Here's our top three facility needs:

- 1) We have to invest more in our horse program, or eliminate it. I have chosen the former. We have just purchased three horses and are spending more on feed this year than the last ten combined. The market is so bad we can get prime trail horses for only \$600. Unfortunately, even though we have good grazing land, a year's feeding now costs more than the animal. We need sponsors for our horses' yearly care and feeding at \$50 a month. Sign up and we'll send you info and pictures on your horse!
- 2) Can your church sponsor a cabin? Cabins are badly needed to replace deteriorating canvas teepees. Materials cost around \$4000. And volunteers are needed to build them. Buy or build a cabin (or both), then take care of it. We'll put up a plaque identifying your church as sponsor.
- 3) Our campers will tell you our water slide needs replacement with a better water sport. This is important. I have a budget goal of \$4-5000. We'll also need a work group for construction.

We know the most important thing is “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man” (James 5:16). We'll accomplish more with prayer power than purchase power. But it takes faith to believe. Time is running out for our once-Christian nation. Domestic missions are sorely needed. May God's people support camp ministry in the southwest!

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