



MERRY CHRISTMAS

AROUND *the* FIRE Winter 2019

RESCUE *the Equine* ★ MENTOR *the Child* ★ HOPE *for the Family* ★ EMPOWER *the Ministry*



The Gathering

The heaviest travel/speaking season of my entire life was winding down toward completion. Judy and I had just landed in one of the largest airports in our nation and were working our way through a four-hour layover. I knew that the large women's conference planned over the following days would be fast paced and once it started, there would be no time to study or prepare in between speaking sessions.

Needing a quiet place to prepare, we threaded through the noisy crowds toward the end of a small terminal. Although it was dirty, dark and cold . . . it was also quiet. I looked for an empty space with minimal distractions so I could ready my heart for the task at hand.

Judy and I sat a few seats apart at the end of a row near a large window. While pulling out my notes and pushing bright pink earplugs deep into my ears, I noticed something unusual. Carefully tucked into the corner of the windowsill six feet in front of me, was a neatly stacked stash of food. Appearing abandoned by its owner, a half-consumed juice, a can of coconut milk, some cashews, a banana and some yogurt were left behind.

Pressing in, I did my best to command my exhausted brain to remember the session notes I had prepared. After thirty minutes of reading the same paragraph, I still could not retain its meaning. Sliding down in my seat until my head rested on the back of the chair, I pushed my notes aside and closed my eyes. My mind wandered through this extraordinary year. Since mid-February, I had only been home four weekends . . . it was now November.

BY KIM MEEDER

Continued on page 2

A rustling sound in front of me roused my eyes open. A woman had just sat down directly across from me next to the window. She wore a reflective vest and the large badge of an airport employee. Her small stature was consumed in multiple layers of clothing. Her head was covered with a balaclava and over-wrapped with a thick scarf. Despite her effort to stay warm through heavy layering, her posture proved that she was still cold.

She leaned heavily against the concrete wall and closed her eyes. I studied her. She was about my age and maybe five feet tall. Although her beautiful skin was dark, there was an unnatural pallor. Barely opening her eyes, she reached for the half-full cup of juice and took a weak drink. The food stash was hers. She had been here a long time.

After resting for a long moment, she glanced my way and started to speak. I quickly pulled out my earplugs and said, "I'm sorry. I didn't hear you." She spoke again in an African accent so heavy that I could not understand her. My prayer was nothing more than, *Holy Spirit, let me hear what You hear. Help me understand her.* As if tuning a muffled radio, the Holy Spirit dialed my ears into her frequency.

Weakly, she said, "It's so cold tonight. I cannot stay warm. I am not well." I responded with a sympathetic, "Oh no. What's wrong?" Her answer was, "I have cancer . . . pancreatic cancer." My heart stopped. I shoved my notes and gear aside and leaned toward her. Before I could organize my thoughts, I heard my voice say, "Friend, can I pray for you?" A shaking hand rose to cover her mouth, but not before a flood of gratitude poured out, "Oh Jesus! Oh my Jesus! You are so good to me!"

Judy and I surrounded her and began to pray. As our prayers went up—Heaven came down.



Complete strangers gathered in a holy triple hug. The once dark, cold, dirty airport terminal was transformed by the love of Jesus pouring through two travelers. Heaven came to earth and impacted an abandoned Liberian woman who was facing a horrific illness alone. The heavy pall of "alone" was instantly incinerated as two women of God grasped the outstretched hands of another sister and drew her into the loving light of His family.

Our tears fell together as we walked with her into the presence of the Living God. With our hands gently placed on her midsection, we asked that the Almighty name of Jesus, the blood of Jesus and the love of Jesus would evict all that offends His holiness and make whole this humble vessel. Loud speakers proclaimed flight departures and boarding order. Arriving passengers swirled around us. Terminal seating areas filled and emptied. The monotonous heartbeat of the airport droned on.

But for one hurting heart—time stopped—as she fully realized it was always the King of kings who held her.

Once the prayers of our gathering tailed out into steady streams of thanksgiving, our new sister revealed something astonishing. In her deeply drenched African accent she recounted, "Even when I am not working, I come to this place, this seat . . . and I wait. I wait . . . for the presence of God. On this night, I rejoice because He has come to me through you two sisters. I am so grateful. My heart sings with gratitude for His faithfulness to me."

She waits in a dark, dirty, jet-fuel-fumigated terminal . . . to encounter the presence of God.



Do you see the parable?

"I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For *where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.*" (Matt. 18:19-20, NLT, emphasis added).

Dear friend, if Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior—you—carry the presence of the Living God. When you purposely encounter another soul with His love, HE—JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF—COMES! It is His Spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control that is released over the suffering in your midst. His presence consumes any darkness He is released into.

As you enter this Christmas season, understand that you carry . . . and *can release* . . . His presence, His Spirit, into every environment you enter. Within the vessel that is "You," carries the greatest gift known to mankind, the Spirit of the Living God. It is He—through you—who lavishes on everyone the transformational love and redemption of Jesus Christ.

Throughout this beautiful season, my encouragement for you is this: may you be filled with a *holy awareness* that in every traffic jam, every crowded store, every grocery line, every gas station, every coffee house, every airport, every home gathering—there is someone—who is desperately waiting to encounter the presence of God.

This Christmas . . . will you purpose to give EVERYONE the greatest gift of all? Give them Jesus' love.

Postscript:

Judy and I continue to be in close contact with our new sister. She explains that although she is often tired, she continues to feel vibrant and full of life. She is profoundly grateful for the God who sees her. She chooses to live in a perpetual state of gratitude to Him every day.

It is our prayer that we will be able to fly her to Oregon in time for the Crystal Peaks Ranch Fellowship in December. We want her to meet ALL her extended family and experience even more of His healing love through fellowship and prayer.

"Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven. Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results." (James 5:13-16, NLT).



ALL PHOTOS BY KIM MEEDER

BE STILL

By Troy Meeder

The sea of Galilee is not a sea at all. It's a lake. With Syria on its eastern border and Israel to the west, this "Sea" is the lowest freshwater lake on the planet. Because mountains surround the entire body of water, it has a reputation as the birthplace of ferocious storms. Winds roar down the surrounding mountainsides, pushing waves up to twenty feet or higher. Such were the conditions recorded in the Gospel of Mathew 14:24-27.

Previously, on a grassy hillside above the water, Jesus had just fed the five thousand. His disciples had gotten into a boat to cross the lake while Jesus sent the crowd home. Night had fallen.

"Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble far away from land, for a strong wind had risen, and they were fighting heavy waves." (Matt. 14:24, NLT)

"Fighting heavy waves." Indeed, they were in the storm.

The disciples had just experienced the astonishing miracle of Jesus feeding the masses—yet within hours—they were deep in the clutches of a powerful storm. This storm was so severe that they feared for their lives.

Nearly like a mirrored image, in this life all of us will face storms we fear we will not survive. Storms will enter our lives through relationships, sicknesses, financial struggles, personal brokenness, innocence lost and loneliness. While not the atmospheric storm faced by the disciples, our struggles today are certainly no less terrifying.

The truth is this: no one is exempt from the storms.

Many will be the times we find ourselves held captive by the raging emotional, physical or spiritual tumult that surround us. As long as we live in this world, we will not escape them—but we can overcome them.

"About three o'clock in the morning, Jesus came to them . . . walking on the water." What an entrance into the situation! Jesus didn't just quietly appear. He didn't swim through the waves . . . He walked ON TOP of them!

"For whatever you might face, know this: our Savior is still Lord over the storm . . . all storms."

In the midst of the raging ferocity of the storm, Jesus reminds us . . . HE IS THE LORD OVER THE STORMS. He does not fear them . . . He walks ON THEM!

Friends, there is no storm that Jesus does not already have dominion over. Like the disciples, while in the struggle, we will battle the storm. We will "fight the heavy waves." We will do our part and—we can choose to trust Him—for His.

Within the midst of the torrent, for those who are listening, He reminds us, "It's all right, I am here, do not be afraid" (verse 27 NLT, 1996 edition).

If this were the only verse we knew, it would be enough to destroy every challenge leveled against us. Jesus Himself states: "It's all right." This is not a suggestion. He is telling us to take heart, take bravery, take valor—and stand in the storm. "I am here." He is Emanuel, our God is with us IN the storm. "Do not be afraid." Because of this truth, we need not fear anything. As a matter of fact, He offers His peace—peace within every storm.

Emmanuel. His name literally means "God with us."

Remember this Christmas season that God is with you.

Perhaps within your life a storm is gathering. Maybe you sense a destructive wind beginning to stir. Or, the storm is an old one, something that has been raging for months, years, even decades. You have been fighting, battling, struggling against the "heavy waves" for what seems like an eternity. For whatever you might face, know this: our Savior is still Lord over the storm . . . all storms.

Mark 4:38-39 tells us, "Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, 'Teacher don't you care that we're going to drown?' When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'SILENCE! BE STILL!' Suddenly the wind stopped and there was a great calm." (emphasis added). At the mere sound of His voice . . . the storm obeyed and became still.

"It's all right. I am here. Do not be afraid."

Beloved, during this season, embrace the powerful truth spoken from our King as if it were a warm blanket of peace on a cold night . . . "It's all right." Even while the storm rages, embrace the promise of His presence . . . "I am here." When fear tries to enter the very core of your being, wrap yourselves up in the promises of His word spoken over you . . . "Do not be afraid."

I pray that this Christmas season you will choose the greatest gift of all—to BE STILL—in His presence.

Merry Christmas Dear Family.

Yes! I would like to shoulder with Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch to support children, horses and families in need.

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The Gift of **COMPLETE FREEDOM**

BY TRENTON RYDER

I'm learning there's absolutely nothing that can disqualify us from the love of Jesus. There's nothing that can stand against His power and love—not even the cowboy hat of a nine-year old boy.

Bobby walked up the ranch driveway for the very first time. At just nine years of age, he already cowered behind a wall of timidity, insecurity and fear. He used his wide brimmed cowboy hat as a veil to shy away from anyone seeing the depth of what truly lay inside. Leading up to the session, I asked Jesus to show me how to encourage this young boy. Two simple words murmured deep into my spirit, "Get Jude."

I was surprised to clearly hear Jesus instruct me to use this little gelding. Jude had been donated to Crystal Peaks with his half-sister just a few months earlier. Being so new to the ranch, he had not yet learned the necessary safety skills to be released into our session riding program.

I introduced myself to Bobby. He didn't say a word.

Taking a few steps toward the barn, I invited him to sit with me on a bench waiting there. He nodded and followed. Without saying anything, he sat right next to me and looked down at his cowboy boots.

I began by telling him there was a small brown horse that needed our help. I shared with Bobby how Jude was fearful, and many things frighten him. I asked Bobby if together we could help Jude overcome his worries. Without lifting his head, Bobby nodded and

silently followed me to the tack room where we retrieved a halter.

Bobby and I walked down through the paddock to Jude. We halted him and Bobby led the small horse up to the hitching post in the main yard. I referred to Jude as "Bobby's horse" and although nothing was said, Bobby seemed happy to have ownership in what was taking place. Because Jude had not yet been released into our session riding program, I explained to Bobby that it was our job to help prepare him for all the silly, fun things kids do.

Side by side, we mimicked the normal grooming and tacking parts of our session program. Once Jude was saddled, I gave the lead to Bobby and we headed for the round pen. Immediately, the Lord said, "Independence Arena." So, we changed our course to the largest arena on the main ranch.

Independence Arena was constructed on July 4th, 1995. Over the years, it has been expanded seven times and is now at full capacity of what the property will allow. In part, its name comes from the date on which it was created, but the true depth of "Independence Arena," comes from what happens within its protective rails. This arena is where we allow independent riding for our kids.

It's a place where children and horses experience the freedom that Christ desires to give to all.

At the far end of the arena is a wooden box where we keep toys for our sessions kids to create games while on horseback. The array of toys in this box is endless; pool-noodles, rings, ropes, cones and hula-hoops. All Ranch horses must be comfortable with these toys to become part of our session program. For the horses not yet released, these toys are used in a variety of ways to build confidence and allow them to become more comfortable with an ever-changing environment.

Walking over to the toy box, Bobby and I threw out as many different toys as we could find. I demonstrated how we use these things to help Jude overcome his fears. By moving the object in the air next to the small horse and stopping when he relaxed, we communicated to Jude that if he chooses to relax—the scary object would go away. This ultimately helped Jude understand that these objects weren't scary at all.

Bobby laughed and laughed every time Jude spooked at an object by either leaping away or throwing his head in the air. My sense was that Bobby's tension was breaking

down and laughter was his release. I couldn't help but notice that when Bobby tried to desensitize Jude, the little horse would stand perfectly still. Jude seemed to know he was working with a young, shy boy.

The young timid child and a young timid horse were clearly stronger . . . together.

Testing what I noticed, I asked Bobby to hold four pool noodles in his hands. Then I encouraged him to pretend that he was a scary octopus and run at Jude. The little horse held fast, standing perfectly still. We then proceeded to dress Jude with as many toys as we could. We placed hula-hoops around his neck, rings on his ears and ropes over the saddle. Once dressed, we asked Jude to walk with us around the arena, dragging these objects along.

Kim stepped to the main gate of the arena and called out to us. I leaned down and asked Bobby if he would like to tell her what we were

trying to accomplish with Jude. He shook his head and hid under his hat again. So, I explained that we're helping Jude overcome his fears. With a shout, Kim yelled, "Yes! Living in Freedom!" It was at that moment the Lord revealed why we were here.

This moment was meant for Bobby to learn what it means to live in complete freedom.

On the arena railing, Bobby and I spent our remaining time together sitting side by side. I shared with him what it says in 1 John 4:18, ". . . perfect love casts out fear." I explained that perfect love is Jesus Christ and that He came, died, and rose again to give us life and life to the fullest in His love.

Bobby remained silent as I explained what it means to go to heaven and spend eternity with Jesus Christ. Then, for the very first time, Bobby appeared from beneath his cowboy hat and looked directly at me.

With a thoughtful voice, he said, "I think I would like to ask Jesus into my heart."

Turning slightly to face Jude, Bobby began, "Jesus . . . would You come into my heart . . . so I can be Your son?"

The simple prayer from a young boy's heart burst through the gates of hell. The enemy's grip on a frightened child was forever broken. One more name was added to the Lambs Book of Life. Indeed, on the rails of Independence Arena, a small brown horse helped a boy receive the freedom that Jesus desires to give anyone who asks.

All of heaven rejoiced at the sound of Bobby's beautiful, honest, powerful prayer.

There's absolutely nothing that can disqualify us from the love of Jesus. There's nothing that can stand against His power and love—not even the cowboy hat of a nine-year old boy.

"And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love.

1 John 4:16-18a



PHOTO BY SARAH ROBINETT



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Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch

NEW CALENDARS ARE READY!

It's our joy to share with you—our extended Ranch family—the essence of what the Lord has been doing at Crystal Peaks this past year. This poignant calendar captures “God breathed” moments within the lives of our kids, volunteers and staff. Each month features a Ranch photograph paired with children’s quotes and encouraging Bible verses.

As our gift to you, we’d like to offer each household one *free* calendar. We pray the Lord will use it to bless and encourage all who see it.

To order a calendar, please go to our website at **www.cpyr.org** and click on “Ranch Life,” on our home page. Or, you can mail in your request to: Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch, 19344 Innes Market Rd., Bend, OR 97703.

If you wish, additional calendars can be ordered as well. To help offset the cost of any extra calendars, donations are greatly appreciated. Production of each calendar is approximately \$8. These added calendars can also be ordered through our website or mail. All international orders outside the US and Canada will be required to pay a \$5 shipping fee.

We wish to thank each of you—near and abroad—for shouldering with us in this ministry of hope.



All stories written in “Around the Fire” newsletter are true.
Some of the names have been changed to protect individual privacy.
“Around the Fire” newsletter stands on the Word of God.
Multiple translations of the Holy Bible are used to assure clarity for our readership.
Each author is afforded the right to choose the translation that best suits their submission.