



Golden Verse

"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" 2 Corinthians 5:17

Did you ever get caught by a cloud? Perhaps it was a roaring soaring Cumulonimbus with its puffy majesty and towering power that suggested a mighty tempest on the horizon. You can feel the pressure change, the wind begins as the thrill of a coming storm sets in.

Maybe it was a Cirrus whose plummy contrails evoke the delicate beauty of an artist's long brushstroke, painting the sky with feathery delight.

Or perhaps a fluffy puffy Cumulus, the fun one, in which turtles, and mushrooms and elephants unbelievably dance across the sky.

I love clouds.

There is a cloud-appreciation society (with over 50,000 members) and its founder Gavin Pretor-Pinney has a delightful Ted Talk, *Cloudy With a Chance of Joy*. *"But I think they're beautiful, don't you?...It's just that their beauty is missed because they're so omnipresent, so commonplace that people don't notice them ...unless they get in the way of the sun."*

Clouds are an amazing piece of God's creation. They bring shade on a sunny day, delight on an afternoon walk, a warning of storm on the way, not to mention the

practical gift to thirsty crops of their life-giving water.

There should be moments, and days, and occasional weeks in which we all stare at the clouds or whatever brings you the simple sheer joy of being alive. Last week on a perfect day many had filled such a prescription and I walked to the Bethesda Fountain. It was such a day I knew throngs of people would be snapping selfies, playing music, blowing giant bubbles and simply relishing life for a moment. It was a beautiful and heart-soaring moment. To see so many find so much. A time to stare at the clouds and to wonder at the beauty of life. Heavenly.

The disciples had an even more fantastic day. Jesus, who died, the rose from the grave is whisked into the clouds! Incredible. Wonderful. Glorious.

But for the disciples it was a time to look to earth. Immediately after Jesus ascends into heaven angels appear castigating the disciples, *"Why do you stand looking up to heaven?"* Surely any one of us would have been gawking at this amazing sight. This was less of an actual question and more of a command.

Time to get busy.

A few years ago, I was standing at the airport counter waiting to check in when the gate agent did something very strange. He started dancing and moving back and forth. He could see I was thoroughly caught off guard, so he pointed to my shirt, "*I'm getting busy!*" At that moment I remembered! I was wearing a t-shirt from my mom that said, "*Jesus is coming! Get busy.*"

Since then, this phrase has rattled around in my brain. How often we forget. Though we don't all have the shirt, we all have the job. And it reminds me that at times we just need to act!

The disciples had been given a job, a mammoth job, take Jesus' gospel to the end of the earth. And to perhaps no one's shock more than their own, mission accomplished! They did it!

It would be too easy for them to
remain in the spot both literally and
metaphorically,
bask in the memory of his power
keep their gaze to heaven,
wait for another sign,
for the wind to change,
stars to align,
sore feet heal,
and frail hearts to grow strong.

Jesus has shown them the way. Over the past several years He taught them about God's kingdom. He showed them how to channel the Spirit's power. He demonstrated the nature of love He demanded; He has

handed over the reins to them. The training wheels are off.

It is called the "*Acts*" of the Apostles, not the musings. Another ancient book known as the *Didache*, which shares teachings of the apostles, didn't make it into the Bible because their acts, i.e., their actions speak louder than words. For the disciples the actions required were clear, travel from town to town, preach the good news, heal the sick, and show the way.

We have an equally pressing mission today. People need the grace that Jesus can give, the fellowship that the Holy Spirit provides, and the love that God pours out so generously. They need it, and they need it badly. The statisticians have finally discovered what we have always known. That being a part of a loving community can be the difference between life and death. Those parts of the country in which people are more engaged in regular worship attendance have a higher chance to survive the great obstacles of life.

Church won't erase your problems. But it can give you hope, give you purpose and empower you to give it to others.

And so, we too have to get busy.

Though it has not come directly from Jesus's lips your commission is clear. Bloom where God has planted you.

One friend of mine found her call in the midst of her teaching job. Some of her students were living in motels, as she said, "*with a parking lot for a playground and a TV for a babysitter.*" She knew it was time to take her head out of the clouds, and her friends as well, and together they provided

food, activities, and more for the children. And, by the way, better jobs for the parents and eventually a real home for many of them. Rather than simply wallowing in the state of the world and laying blame at others' feet they got busy. And they changed lives.

Your calling may be as simple and powerful as living your faith in the place where you work. Several members have shared with me the struggle of being a Christian in this secular world. They don't feel comfortable talking about their faith but still want it to matter where they work.

It does not mean pounding on the Bible.

It does mean having a servant's heart toward your workers.

It does not mean telling them how to live their lives.

It does mean showing them by how you live yours.

If you follow His call,

people will notice.

When you repay no one evil for evil,

tame your tongue,

honor others,

judge not,

love your enemies

and show the compassion of Christ.

If you live these in your place of work people will notice, and wonder, and that's

when you let them know and invite them to Brick.

We all have this mission and there are times when we will be tempted to abandon our ethics because Jesus is asking more of us than we feel we can give. And He knows this, and there is a time to get even busier but there is also a time He gives us to stare into the clouds.

It is the time when the well has run dry, our purpose is lost, and our cynicism reigns supreme.

There was a funeral here a few years ago. A very successful woman with a gold medal from the King of Sweden!! She described herself as having her head in the clouds! She was clearly not flighty in mind or temperament; there was a very earthy and rooted embracing of life and all it offers; but she explained that that is where her faith is, in the clouds.

When she looked to the clouds, when she lifted her head to the heavens, she felt God's presence; God's beauty; God's creativity. God's both out of reach, you can't touch the clouds; but it is also right there; you can see it, anytime you want!!!

So, we need the cloudy moments of delight not to stay stuck in heaven but to be rooted on earth.

God has crafted an amazing life for us all. Duty and beauty and both are sublime. Immanuel Kant, perhaps greatest philosopher of modern age, famously wrote that two things filled him with awe -- the starry heavens above and the moral law within.

There is a rhythm to this thing called faith. At times it will feel like the Christlike agony of sacrificing it all, but in the very next the resurrection of eternal joy.

Sometimes in the same moment.
Amen.