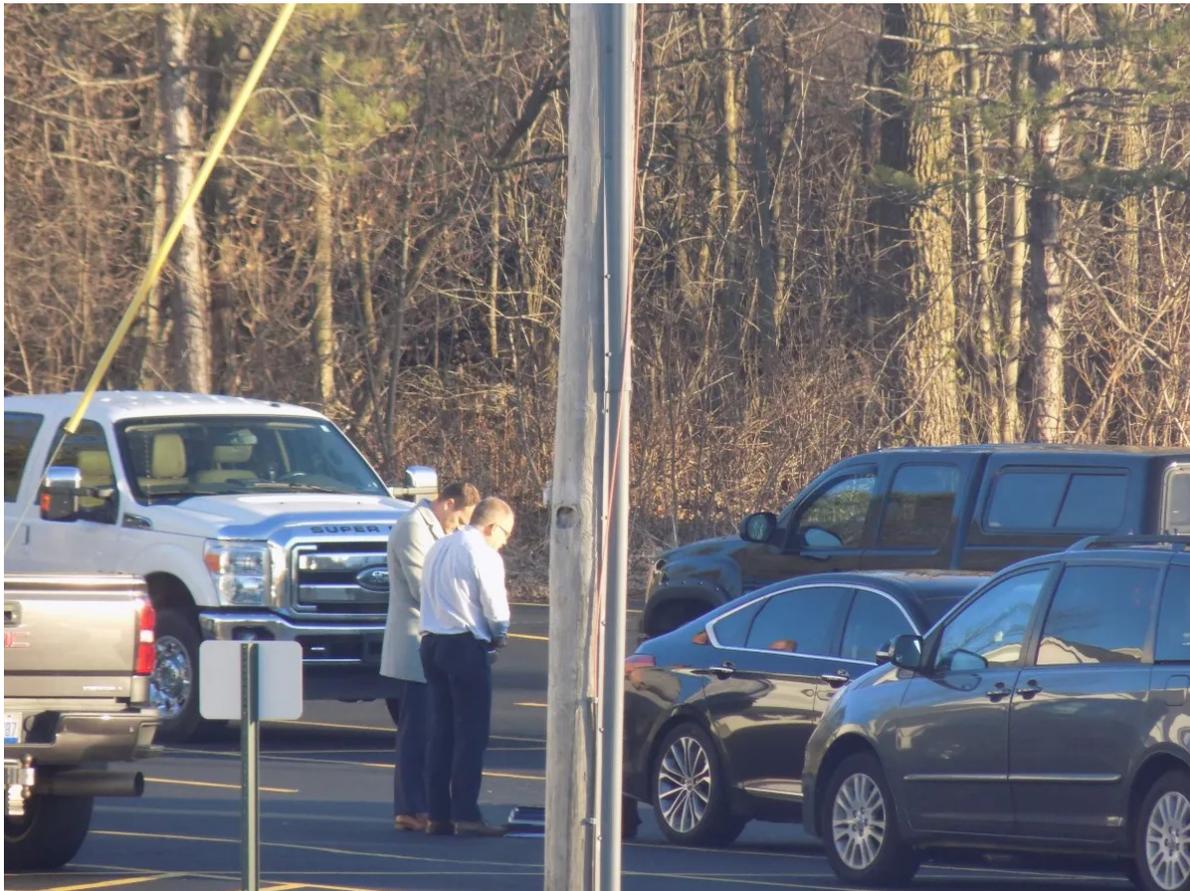


A Strait Betwixt Two

A blog born of bewilderment

Running Through a Troop



“For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall.” Psalm 18:29

I said in my last post that there were things that have amused me in the last few years.

One of those times stands out in my mind.

Rev. Lanning had been suspended from office, and Trinity PRC had been called in to give advice.

Elder Bryan VanBaren and I had been relieved of our duties.

Since we were no longer privy to any communications from the consistory, we would keep

each other informed of developments, mostly by text message.

Living right next door to church, Rev. Lanning could keep us informed as he and his family watched the parade of cars coming and going the men went about their evil deeds.

One evening in early December 2020, the parking lot at church was full of cars, and we took that to mean that Byron Center PRC's consistory and Trinity PRC's consistory were meeting.

Which led to us receiving a rather cryptic text from Bryan: "Heading that way. Passage about running through a troop..."

What?

Heading what way?

Running through a troop?

What was he planning on doing, breaking into the meeting at church?

So a few messages were sent, asking him, "Bryan, are you going into the meeting?"

Silence.

More messages were sent, telling him that it was not a good idea to break into the meeting, that even if the men on the consistory were acting disorderly, we must not.

More silence.

Was he actually doing it? Was he driving to church to let the men have it for their wicked deeds?

No, not Bryan; surely he is much too mild-mannered for that...right?

The messages to Bryan increased in frequency and urgency, telling him that breaking into the meeting was not the right thing to do and that he should reconsider that course of action.

Finally, fourteen minutes after the last text, Bryan responded: "Thanks for that good advice!"

It turned out that Bryan was busy caring for his aging father and did not have his phone with him. He had no intention of rushing into a meeting uninvited.

Bryan was quick to forgive our rush to judgment, and we had a good laugh about it then,

and a few times since then.

It was a moment of levity in the midst of a very trying time.

That reflected who Bryan was, however: a man who was always eager to forgive. (**“For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee” Psalm 86:5.**)

I did not know Bryan before we were elected elders together at Byron Center PRC. I can only remember one conversation with him before that time, and that was standing next to a ball field at Grandville Little League watching our sons play baseball.

Although I did not know him before 2019, I got to know him very well after that.

One thing that stands out to me about Bryan is his sense of compassion. (**“But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” Matthew 9:36.**) The man is simply filled with compassion for others. As we worked together and I could see him in very trying times, times that reveal the character of a man, I would think, “Has this man ever had a selfish thought?”

His compassion extended not just to those of his flock who would have no quarrel with him. His compassion extended even to those who treated him cruelly and spoke evilly of him. (**“Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” 1 Peter 2:23.**) He simply did not care about his reputation and name. He is a servant of servants. (**“But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” Phil. 2:7.**)

This would come out even after it became clear that the other elders of Byron Center had made up their minds that they had to remove Rev. Lanning in order to restore peace in their marriages, in their families, and among their friends. Even then, Bryan would say to me, “Dewey, we have to help them understand!”

Help them understand?

These men refused to understand. Bryan had seen time and time again that these men would not hear the word of God, would not be governed by the word of God, but were insistent on following their own wicked earthly wisdom.

And still he says, “We have to help them understand”?

Are you kidding me?!

He was sincere.

He was genuine.

What he was saying in his patient, long-suffering way, was this: “Yes, Dewey, after even all of this, we must not give up on them, but we have to help them understand.”

This came out in vivid fashion after we had been relieved of our duties, grounds for which action is probably found in Article 87 of the Church Order.

I received a message from Bryan one Monday morning that he wanted to come over and meet with me at my house. He also emailed me a document that he wanted me to read.

He had asked for a meeting with the consistory of Byron Center PRC for the two of us to appear before them that Monday night. He wanted to discuss that meeting with me.

When he arrived at my house it was evident that he had not gotten much sleep. The reason for that soon became clear. He had been up all night writing a letter that he wanted to read to the consistory. All through the night he had been writing and rewriting this letter that he hoped and prayed would be used by God to correct the rebellious children that occupied the office of elder at Byron Center PRC.

The meeting went as you might imagine.

By now the elders were fully set in their ways, and there was nothing that would move them, not even the word of God that Bryan brought to them in that meeting.

Even to ask for the meeting was a testimony to Bryan’s long-suffering and patience. Lesser men than Bryan would have said about those elders, “A plague on all your houses!,” but not Bryan. (**“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” 2 Peter 3:9.**)

I remember a time after a service early in our time as a new congregation when I expressed doubt about one aspect of a sermon. His response was immediate. “What are you saying? That was the word of God.” The look on his face and the words that he immediately spoke showed me my folly and the error of what I had said. God used his rebuke—faithful wound of a friend—to work repentance in my heart for my unbelief. (**“But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men” Matthew 16:23.**)

The other thing that stands out to me about Bryan is that he loves the truth. Like very few others, he loves the worship of God where that truth is taught. Although Bryan has sacrificed a great deal, he never flinched from leading the people in that truth. (**Psalm 89**).

Loving truth, Bryan abhorred the lie. He simply cannot abide evil, in any form. That is why he chose to walk out of the meeting with the church visitors rather than pray with the men who had performed such a wicked deed. (**“And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves” Matthew 21:12-13.**) (The picture at the top of this post was taken by a member of the Lanning family. They were, no doubt, glued to their living room window as they watched men come and go, all working toward the wicked removal of their husband and father. One member of the family captured this picture of Bryan praying in the parking lot after the two elders had left the meeting, refusing to pray with the workers of iniquity inside the consistory room.)

To speak personally, looking back, my confession is that I have only gained.

One of the most precious things I have gained is a brother.

Bryan was willing to rebuke me because he loved me.

And he loved me because he is my brother. (**“And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother” Matthew 12:49-50.**)

And knowing what I do about him, I can tell you that Bryan doesn't much appreciate this post.

I can hear him: “Dewey, what are you doing?!”

“Stop it!”

Bryan detests hearing praise of himself.

He won't hear it, and if you try to bring it, he will deflect it and redirect it.

The man is humble. (**“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” 2 Corinthians 8:9.**)

I can hear him. “God be praised, Dewey, not man!”

But I don't apologize for this post at all, Bryan.

I don't take back a word of it, and I won't accept your rebuke regarding it.

Because now, Bryan, it is time for me to help *you* understand.

I haven't been talking about you at all.

This entire post (link) has been about Christ who lives in you.

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

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