

# ONE TRAIL TO THINKING ROCK

5:00 am, Tuesday, September 9<sup>th</sup>

Although the day held no special significance for me, I just had the feeling that I was supposed to be doing something not in my regular routine for the day. So, I opened my day planner and had a look. There it was—7:00 am, Clint at the Homestead. Then I remembered. He had a hankering to ride up to Horse Sense Hill and Thinking Rock, and he had invited me along. I checked for the proper attire immediately and got myself in high gear.

My mount for the morning ride went by the name of Freckles, so gentle a horse that I could probably have gotten by without even holding the reins. The air felt crisp on my face. It seems like fall has come a little early this year. Although Horse Sense Hill did not sit at a high elevation, it still stood veiled by a thin cloud as we made our way up the trail. By the time we reached Thinking Rock, the veil had mostly pulled back. Faced with an always inspiring view, I could think of no better way to start the day.

Clint pulled a couple of old towels out of his left saddlebag and laid them out on the dew-

covered flat rock. Then he went back to his horse and pulled out a paper from the right saddlebag. He handed me the paper.

“What have we here?” I asked. “A topic for discussion?”

“I pulled this out from a packet that Granny got from Medicare,” replied Clint.

Looking at the paper, I remarked, “It’s all Greek to me ... I’m sorry ... a little theological humor.” Of course, I had to suffer through Greek in pastoral training, but line 14 looked like Greek to me. “Let’s see ... It has been a while, but I believe it is saying something akin to, ‘If you have a question about this notice, you have a right to get help and information in your language at no cost.’.”

“Yeah, that’s what it says in English there on the top of the page,” said Clint.

“Thanks, Clint. I went and strained my brain for nothing.”

“There are twenty-four different languages for that same message on this paper. Does that seem a little ... a little ... I don’t know, off the wall, to you?”

“You mean the fact that all the people speaking all these languages live in the United States, are eligible for Medicare, and don’t speak English?”

“Well, yeah,” said Clint.

“There does seem to be a disconnect there,” I said. “Oh, I understand that the government tries to accommodate everybody and not show the slightest bit of discrimination. And, certainly, if someone has followed the rules and paid their dues, they should get what is coming to them, whether they speak English or not. The people of Cedar Crossing are a pretty homogenous group, so we rarely encounter much in the way of language issues in our daily lives. I came across some language barriers a few times when I was away at college, but it didn’t seem awkward. The immigrants I encountered seemed to make a diligent effort to learn English and if they were not yet fluent, they always had someone with them to help with interpreting.”

“I don’t know, Pastor. I know that America is a melting pot of people, cultures, and languages, but for the government to have to do something like this paper, it just seems ... it seems divisive to me.”

“Um ... I do find it a little troublesome in a deeper sense and, in a way, you are right. I believe

that this melting pot of ours is one of our strengths and we should celebrate the diverse array of people and cultures. But, if we are to remain the ‘United’ States of America, we must have some unifying elements. The ability to share a common language, I believe, is a critical unifying factor. I think you could probably say the same for the flag and even the national anthem. Without such ways to unite, we run the risk of the different people and cultures not melting in the pot. The combined, unique flavor of all the people is not there, for each culture has only its individual taste.”

“Do you think it’s wrong or prejudicial to think that way, Pastor?”

“In the right context, no. As with a lot of things, some people will take it to the extreme and use it to fuel their prejudices.”

Clint and I looked out across the valley and remained silent for a while. Overhead, a bald eagle circled and voiced a morning greeting. A raccoon slowly approached us, trying to gauge if any closer inspection would provide something to eat. When we offered him nothing, he scurried off. The morning sun eventually burned off the rest of the veil and distant farms became visible. We marveled at another day in the diversity of God’s Creation.

“Isn’t that the Culbertson’s farm down there along the creek, Clint?”

“No, that’s the Smith place,” he answered.

“I don’t get up here enough,” I remarked. “It kind of gives you a different perspective. I look at the valley and I think of all the people in the flock of St. John and all the others who worship the Lord in other churches. I’m sitting here and I can’t help but think about the parallel to what we were talking about with the many languages and the status of the church today.”

“How so, Pastor?”

“Take that paper and write denominations in place of languages and you’d get a similar picture. I think, at last count, there are some two-hundred different denominations in America alone. The equivalent unifying element to the English language would, for most, be the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Once you get beyond the path that Jesus blazed here on earth, all those denominations divide and divert to their own language, so to speak.”

“What do you believe God thinks about it all, Pastor?”

“Well, in some ways, I would imagine He loves the diversity of worship from the whole group. He has created a diverse world, so I think you could, by extension, say He considers all the diverse expressions of the various denominations as something joyful. But there are other aspects that I don’t believe He is happy with. When the divisions keep His people from uniting on some fundamental issues, He probably says something like, ‘Oh, foolish man. How little you understand.’ The Bible can be a little vague on some issues, but I believe it is crystal clear on others. I would submit that it is perfectly reasonable to disagree on the vague areas, but, for the love and respect of God, we should unite on the crystal-clear ones.”

“Like which ones, Pastor?”

“Just to mention a few: the divinity of Christ, what He did in coming to earth, the life of a child in the womb, the marriage of a man and a woman. Part of the problem is that we can’t even agree on what is crystal clear and what is vague, much less work together on what we do agree is crystal clear.”

“Do you think that when we face God, He will ask us what denomination we belonged to?”

“No, I think He already knows that. Besides, it wouldn’t be much of a courageous admission.”

“What questions do you think God will ask us?” asked Clint.

“I don’t know for sure what all we will have to answer. I don’t think anybody knows for sure. One question I know He will have is if we believe Jesus paid the price for our sins. Beyond that, if anybody ever comes back with a list of the questions, it will sure make deciding on sermon topics much easier. It could send shock waves throughout the Christian community, though. We might find that a great deal of what we put so much emphasis on isn’t really that important after all.”

“Well, it looks like the dew is beginning to dry up, so I can get some baling done now. I reckon it’s about time to head back.”

“I suppose so, my friend.”

“You know, Pastor, I’ve had a lot of different people come up here with me over the years. This old rock has been a site for many lively discussions sometimes. When people sit here and start to say what they really think, it’s hard to find much agreement on anything. And that’s okay because I believe that’s why God put this old flat rock here.

When the conversational dust settles, though, there's one thing that everybody who comes up here has in common with everyone else and one thing that everybody can agree on."

"What's that, Clint?"

"Everybody's got to ride the same trail up and the same trail down."

"Yeah, you're right."

Freckles and I followed Clint and Jake down the trail in silence, except for an occasional whinny. If the horses were trying to add something to the conversation, I'm not sure what it was.