

Let's Go Deeper...
Wednesday, February 15, 2017
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I use this communication each Wednesday to reflect—go deeper-- on something that happened the previous Sunday. But this past Sunday I wasn't with you in worship. I was in Arizona worshipping with the folks at Coolwater Christian Church and their pastor, the Rev. Katie Sexton. It was the first time Jennie and I have been back to worship at Coolwater since we departed in July of 2014 to head east to Lexington.

- Katie preached a good sermon on being salt and light, the same passage Pastor Elizabeth proclaimed to you.
- Jennie and I got to sit in a row of chairs alongside our son, daughter-in-law, her mother, and our two grandchildren.
- We were blessed anew with Dick Huggins' prayers, a Coolwater elder whose words always enriched our worship.
- We came forward to the altar for communion, a weekly practice at Coolwater from Day One, and I received the cup from Mansoor Rowhani, an Iranian immigrant I baptized in 2012. I will cherish his friendship in Christ for as long as I live.
- At the end of the service, we observed the Coolwater tradition of joining hands across the rows of chairs and singing "Go Now in Peace," a lovely Benediction whose lyrics and melody I know *by heart*.

And after worship, I walked the Meditation Trail that traverses the perimeter of the eight-acre desert property, a path our fledgling congregation scratched and scraped out of the desert well over a decade ago.

I needed to see the plow again.

In early November of 2007, I had a vision. I saw in my mind's eye a plow: the upper part of its shiny blade glistening in the sun, the lower portion dug down into the ground, in its wake a freshly turned furrow ready to be planted.

The first thing that came to me as I pondered the plow was its shiny appearance. I asked myself, "*Why is it so shiny? What's the significance of that?*"

The first explanation that came to me was that it had been *tempered*. The plow was shiny because it's made of tempered steel. I'm no metallurgist, but I do know that metal tools, in order to be made strong and durable, are tempered. They are heated up and then cooled down—refined by fire—and as a result they are stronger and more durable. The more I thought of it, the more I saw in the tempered plow our 5-year-old congregation who, by the trials that we faced in

2007, rather than breaking us or destroying us, were instead tempered, *steeled*, made stronger, more resilient.

But I also perceived in the shininess of the plow *sharpness*. In the course of my pondering the vision I looked up the word plow in a Bible Dictionary and read, “In biblical times the plow was quite primitive and farmers were able to do little more than scratch the surface and cut a shallow furrow into the soil. The point of the plow broke up hard-packed, sun-baked ground to give seeds a place to germinate... Therefore it required sharpening to be effective.”

I recalled a passage in Proverbs that says, “**As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another**” (Proverbs 27:17), highlighting the truth that we need each other’s encouragement, correction, and gifts to be sharp. Left to our own devices, independent of one another, we become dull and ineffective. The shiny plow’s sharpness underlined for me the importance of our learning to turn to one another, lean on one another, and share with each other so as to stay sharp.

All told, the vision of the shiny plow suggested to me that our congregation had been tempered-- refined by fire—and as a result of our staying together through the trials of those first five years, and of 2007 in particular, sharpened us for the work yet before us.

I believe God provides signs to confirm visions. A week or so after I had the vision of the plow, I was out on the as-yet-undeveloped property. Walking it. Praying over it. And as I followed the path that we had carved out of the desert, a few years before, I spotted something on the ground. I couldn’t believe my eyes. I bent over to pick it up. I held it in my hands.

It was a plow blade. Specifically, what is called a ripper. I picked it up and every twenty feet or so I bent over and with its tip scraping the soil, I said, “I claim this for Jesus Christ.” Over and over again as I walked the path with the plow in my hand, I reached down, broke ground with it, and said, “I claim this for Jesus Christ.”

And then I did one last thing. I touched it to my own heart and said, “I claim this for Jesus Christ. Use me, Lord, to plow new ground and make new disciples of Christ.”

On my last walk on the Meditation Trail in July of 2014, the day before Jennie and I headed east, I took the plow blade out to where I had originally found it and placed it ever so carefully under a cholla cactus where I knew no one would find it, let alone bother it.

After worship this past Sunday, I walked the trail one more time and stopped at a certain prickly plant at the base of which was the plow just where I had left it years ago. Standing there, I silently prayed for Coolwater’s continued resilience. And for my own.

It was a good Sunday. Just what I needed.

