

## Sabbatical Reflections

### *“Paradox”*

July 14, 2019

It's so great to be back! I missed ya'll. It was great to see so many of you on Wednesday night at the potluck and worship night. And I loved meeting so many new folks as well! For those of you who don't know me, I am...as you may have guessed, a pretty high extrovert and as I tell my kids I know no strangers, only friends I haven't met yet.

So, this was my third sabbatical and marked my 20<sup>th</sup> year of working at North Heartland. Yes I started when I was 10. And today's message,

Is called Paradox

**FULL SLIDE** Pair of Docks photo

Okay okay...I missed the chance to tell a dad joke since I was away on Father's Day so I had to sneak that one in there.

Seriously though...I feel truly blessed and honored to work in a place that honors time away to rest, to renew, to lean in to our family and of course to have extended silence and solitude with Jesus. And thankfully I was able to do all that! More on that shortly.

But first I have to say...I truly missed this place, I missed our church family and gathering with you all on Sundays. As many of you know, when a staff member is on sabbatical they are still encouraged and challenged to be in church somewhere on a Sunday morning.

And so, during my time away, I was able to see many great churches and really enjoyed seeing how different families of faith worship

but man... I missed ya'll. Listening online is nice but it's just not the same.

I want to take a minute though to speak to something I did notice as I visited various churches.

Though I really enjoyed different aspects of the churches I visited, I was reminded how painfully awkward it is (maybe not for everyone but for many) to show up to a new place and feel like an outsider. Some of the places I visited did a great job while others were focused more on their family and so I felt really, really out of place. Again, no judgement on those places, I know how very easy it is to get distracted chatting with those you know and miss new folks.

Here's some things I saw that I think if we could all remember to do (and some of you already do this so just keep it up), if we did

some of these things, it would go a long way to make new folks feel welcome into our community.

Make eye contact and say hello or good morning.

Open the door for others and smile. Offer a helping hand if they have their hands full.

When it's time to greet others, go out of your way to say hi to someone who you don't recognize and say, good morning or great to see you today, glad you are here.

If you are comfortable with it, walk across the room to say hi and introduce yourself to someone you don't recognize and greet them.

The most difficult time for me was during a service where the community had an

extended greeting time, 7-10 minutes and I just stood there and no one chatted with me. It was super awkward.

I didn't need a long conversation just a "hey good to see you. Good morning."

Point is, remember hospitality matters, not just to the new attendee, or the unconnected but to everyone who comes here. Let's practice being warm and welcoming to each other on a regular basis. And honestly even though I appreciated the First Impressions teams at those churches, I appreciated more the non volunteer who said hello. Again, no major conversation, just a smile, eye contact and something that said I see you and I'm glad you are here. I want to get better at that and I hope you do too.

Okay, end of soap box!

Oh one last thing... if like me you have been out this summer and you missed Ladell's message, The Normal Christian Life on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, give it a listen. Such a good reminder of what that looks like, it really challenged and encouraged me and I think it will you too.

And then the Divided States of America series that Rick just finished last Sunday! WOW! I mean I've heard him teach a lot of those concepts in the past but I so needed to be reminded in this heated time we are living in especially as we prepare for the 2020 election. I'm keeping that series stored on my phone in my podcasts so I can re-listen again as the election season continues to heat up. If you missed them, be sure to check them out on our app, website or podcast. Always free and available.

Okay...so what did I do with myself for six weeks away from North Heartland? Well it

takes about a week to ramp down and tie up loose ends for while you are away and a week to ramp up preparing to get back into the swing of things.

So with the rest of the time, I spent a lot of time with my family.

Here's me and our son, Steven

**FULL SLIDE**-Steven and Shannon photo

My husband with our daughter, Maya

**FULL SLIDE**-Price and Maya photo

I spent time exploring KC and Springfield, with my daughter and her friends including her two best, childhood friends pictured here.

**FULL SLIDE**-Mack, Maya and Izzy photo (Maya's in the middle)

She's the one in the middle with her two bffs, Mack and Izzy.

And then I was truly blessed to spend almost two weeks in Colorado. The first several days, I spent in Colorado Springs by myself at the Mount Saint Francis Retreat Center... a retreat center run by Franciscan nuns, a beautiful quiet place.

**FULL SLIDE**-Retreat center sign

This is my third time retreating here as I have spent time during each of my sabbaticals here. It's a very quiet, simple place where you can really get away from the distractions of the world.

**FULL SLIDE**-my room

I spent my time here reading the journals

from the last six years, since my last sabbatical, getting the big picture view of what's been going in my life and where God has been at work in me.

### **FULL SLIDE**-property

I spent a lot of time just taking in God's creation and being still and silent before Him. Reading, praying and reflecting.

### **FULL SLIDE**-Waterfall and deer

And what I'm going to talk about today will be mostly from my time there which we will get to shortly I promise.

Following my time alone, I picked up this guy at the airport.

### **FULL SLIDE**-Price and Shannon

So we could head to Breckenridge and celebrate our 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary early (we will officially hit 25 years in August). So much great stuff but I'll just show you a couple things.

We soaked up a lot of beautiful views.

### **FULL SLIDE**-Mountains

We literally soaked in some amazing hot springs.

### **FULL SLIDE**-Hot spring pool

We got soaked when we went sailing on what was supposed to be a peaceful sunset cruise that ended with us getting caught in a microburst on the lake.

### **FULL SLIDE**-Sailboat

Fun times.

Seriously fun times. Price and I soaked up a lot of fun and great couple time!

And though spending time with family is great, and having time with my husband was amazing. What makes a sabbatical different than a long vacation is the intentional time away to be still before the Lord.

And though I had pockets of time like that through the sabbatical, the extended time away by myself at the retreat center was the most renewing and transformative.

I really do wish I could take you all to the retreat center in Colorado—or even to the one I visited last fall near Leavenworth, Kansas—and we could just spend an hour in silence, listening to the wind rustle the trees, the birds chirping, just breathing in the fresh

air. Free of all distractions. Just quiet in the Lord's creation, listening for His voice speaking to our hearts.

Sadly I can not, but I did decide I could at least give you a couple minutes that could sort of simulate that for you. So let's silence our phones, quiet ourselves and either watch the video or close your eyes. And no worries, if you doze off I or your neighbor will wake you in two minutes.

Take these next couple of minutes to take some deep breaths and to clear your mind. Ask God to meet you here today to speak His truth and grace, His peace and mercy to your heart. Let's be still.

### **VIDEO-Relax**

Will you pray with me?

Meet us here, Lord. Speak your truth and

grace and mercy to our hearts and minds.

So that was the beginning of my retreat, literally just sitting outside in the peace and quiet, no phone, no distractions and just breathing it all in. Within the first five minutes, I could feel my soul expanding, my mind clearing and the weight of expectations and distractions lifting.

In that quiet place, the Lord reminded me what a crazy pace we keep. In a world filled with “time savers,” my heart is often so hurried and filled with distractions. I was reminded that without a time out away from the phone, the email, the social media, it’s next to impossible to hear the still small voice of Jesus.

At the beginning of my sabbatical, I posted on social media that I was going dark and I removed all the apps from my phone. The

first week was very difficult, as I had forgotten how much I habitually look at those apps and mindlessly scroll through them. It was so hard to unplug from them and stay off and “in the dark” but I gotta tell ya, six weeks later and I’ve been very hesitant to get back on and have decided to not put the apps back on my phone, except Instagram which I need for work. That said...if you need to reach me or want me to know something, email is best.

So for some of you...maybe your takeaway from today is to do just that. To find a place to be quiet and alone with God. Maybe a long Sunday drive with the radio off and the windows down. Maybe sitting at a quiet park. Or maybe you need to take a social media fast. To dial down the distractions, to turn down the volume of your hurried life and turn up the volume on what the Lord may be trying to say to you.

So often, when you get quiet and silence the distractions you are better able to hear the Lord. And that's what happened for me.

As I moved into the silence and started reading and reflecting, I read this in Brennan Manning's book, "The Ragamuffin Gospel" and I was overcome.

"When I get honest, I admit I am a bundle of paradoxes. I believe and I doubt. I hope and get discouraged, I love and I hate, I feel bad about feeling good, I feel guilty about not feeling guilty. I am trusting and suspicious. I am honest and I still play games...

To live by grace means to acknowledge my whole life story, the light side and the dark. In admitting my shadow side I learn who I am and what God's grace means. As Thomas Merton put it, 'A saint is not someone who is good but who experiences the goodness of

God.'" (Ragamuffin Gospel, page 26)

**BOTTOM SLIDE-** A saint is not someone who is good but who experiences the goodness of God.

We are all paradoxes.

**BOTTOM SLIDE-** Paradox...a situation, person, or thing that combines contradictory features or qualities.

I'm both good and bad. I'm a sinner and a saint. I'm guilty and forgiven. I'm overbearing and weak. I'm too much and yet not enough. I'm lazy and yet a workaholic. I love to be needed and I resent being needed. We are all paradoxes...a mixture of contradictions.

And as I pondered that, I sensed God showing me how far too often I struggle to live with that tension that I am a paradox...



I'm either obsessed with my badness, my sin, my shortcomings or with my goodness and all the "good" things I do and neither of those places is where I need to be because in those places my focus is on me and not on Jesus.

See there are times when I get so sucked into the "bad" side of me that I am overcome by shame.

I totally resonate with how author and pastor, Peter Scazzero describes shame in his book *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, "Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of being fundamentally flawed, defective, unworthy, and 'deficient in some vital way as a human being.' So we work harder, and then work even harder...Guilt is about something I do. Shame, on the other hand, is about ***who I am.***

**BOTTOM SLIDE-** "Shame testifies not to wrong doing but to flawed being."

(Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, page 151)

See when shame takes over my mind and heart, I move into the land of self-loathing. I'm obsessed with my flawed being and I lose touch with the Good News of Jesus' love for me and his sacrifice on my behalf.

In the land of self-loathing where shame is king, I follow the pattern of Adam and Eve after they disobeyed God and ate from the tree they were told to avoid. In Genesis, chapter 3 we read:

*Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*

*Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"*

*He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."*

*And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"*

*The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."*

*Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"*

*The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*

So what did Adam and Eve do with their shame?

They tried to cover it up, then they hid and they resorted to blaming.

In your shame have you ever done that? I know I have. Have you tried to cover up your shame in hopes no one sees it? Tried to hide the wrappers, the bottle, the receipts, the emails, the websites?

Have you blamed your messed up childhood, your job stress, your family's dysfunction, your spouse's inattentiveness?

**BOTTOM SLIDE-** In the land of self-loathing... we try to cover our shame, hide it or blame it on someone or something else.

We can... well I know I can... lose my identity there in the land of self-loathing. I start believing not that I have failed but that I am a failure.

And as I pondered this, I was reminded of a story told in John chapter 5

*Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda<sup>1</sup> and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time,*

**BOTTOM SLIDE**-*he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”*

*“Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”*

*Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.*

*John 5:1-9 (NIV)*

And I was reminded that Jesus offers me the same...do I want to get well? Am I ready to give up my identity of shame? Do I want to leave the land of self-loathing? He offers me the opportunity to get up and follow up him out. So do I want to leave?

I can put my trust in Him... He who first loved me. He who gave up His life to pay for my sins. All of them... past, present and future.

There is nothing that can separate me from His love.

I love these words penned by Brennan Manning inspired by Romans 8:38, “While Jesus calls each of us to a more

perfect life, we cannot achieve it on our own. To be alive is to be broken, to be broken is to stand in need of grace. It is only through grace that any of us could dare to hope that we could become more like Christ.

The saved sinner with the tilted halo has been converted from mistrust to trust, has arrived at an inner poverty of spirit, and lives as best he or she can in rigorous honesty with self, others and God.

The question of the gospel of graces puts to us is simply this: Who shall separate you from the love of Christ? What are you afraid of?

Are you afraid that your weakness could separate you from the love of Christ? It can't.

Are you afraid that your inadequacies could separate you from the love of Christ? They

can't.

Are you afraid that your inner poverty could separate you from the love of Christ? It can't.

Difficult marriage, loneliness, anxiety, over your children's future? They can't.

Negative self-image? It can't.

Economic hardship, racial hatred, street crime? They can't.

Rejection by loved ones or the suffering of loved ones? They can't.

Persecution by authorities, going to jail? They can't.

Nuclear war? It can't.

Mistakes, fears, uncertainties? They can't.

**BOTTOM SLIDE-**The gospel of grace calls out: NOTHING can ever separate you from the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You must be convinced of this, trust it, and never forget to remember. Everything else will pass away, but the love of Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Faith will become vision, hope will become possession, but the love of Jesus Christ that is stronger than death endures forever. In the end, it is the one thing you can hang onto.” (Brennan Manning, The Ragamuffin Gospel, page 85-87)

Do you find yourself living in the land of self-loathing? Do you want to get well? Then get up and follow Him. Fix your eyes upon Jesus.

And speaking of fixing your eyes on Jesus,

the same is true when we find ourselves living on the other side, the land of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency.

Just as dangerous of a place...maybe even more dangerous, for it is here

**BOTTOM SLIDE-** In the land of self-righteousness, we can be doing a lot of “good things” for God and miss that our hearts have turned from Him.

Here our eyes shift from Jesus and His sacrifice to our good behavior and deeds.

A subtle shift of the heart and we'll find ourselves in this land, focused on how well we follow Jesus especially compared to all those sad sacks who are in the land of self-loathing. Those people are a mess, they just can't seem to get it together. If they would just behave like us, they could be as

righteous as we are.

I'm reminded of a story Jesus once told that is recorded in the gospel of Luke,

*To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that*

*I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'*

*"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'*

*"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.*

**BOTTOM SLIDE-** *For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

Luke 18: 9-14 (NIV)

When we lean too heavy into our own goodness and move to the land of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency, we lose perspective of who is God. We tell God and sometimes others about all the good we have done and we expect something in return (if you are familiar with the parable of the prodigal or lost son, you might recognize this attitude in the prodigal's older brother). Maybe we expect an easier life, more favor, better status. In this land, we lose perspective on our salvation and how exactly we came to receive it.

Again Brennan Manning says it better than I could,

“But the salvation Jesus brought could not be earned. There could be no bargaining with God in a petty poker table atmosphere: “I have done this, therefore you owe me that.” Jesus utterly destroys the notion that our works demand payment in return.

**BOTTOM SLIDE-** Our puny works do not entitle us to barter with God. Everything depends on His good pleasure.” (Ragamuffin Gospel page 57)

That quote reminds me of a worship song we’ve been singing around here. The lyrics say, I stop all negotiation with the God of all creation.

When we are living in the land of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency we forget that God owes us nothing for our “good behavior.” He has already given us mercy and has made a way for us to be right with

Him and when are eyes are fixed on Him we are not only content with that but so very grateful.

Again Brennan Manning, nails it.

“Thank God! I am wonderfully content with a God who doesn’t deal with me as my sins deserve. On the last day when Jesus calls me by name, “Come, Brennan... (Come, Shannon...), blessed of my Father,” it will not be because Abba is just, but because His name is mercy.” (Ragamuffin Gospel, page 102)

It will not be for what I have done but for what’s been done for me and His mercies which are new every morning and HIS faithfulness not mine.

See, neither land is great! To be obsessed with shame, we miss the opportunity Jesus

offers us to be made well, to be healed and to have His identity spoken over us. To be obsessed with our good behavior and deeds, we lose touch with our Savior and our hearts grow cold and distant from Him and others and we become ungrateful and demanding.

In both lands, we focus in on ourselves instead of fixing our eyes on the author and perfecter of our faith.

Jesus said we are to love God with all our hearts, mind and soul. He is to be our first love and yet if we are in either of these lands, he is clearly not!

And I'm so very grateful that beginning next week Rick is actually going to do a five-week series called First Love where we will take time to really unpack what that means and how to do so.

Jesus said everything we were to do boiled down to two commands...love God and love one another. We can't do either well if we are living in either of these lands.

Focusing on our badness or our goodness, will only keep us focused on ourselves. We will miss out on soaking in God's grace and mercy, we will miss the opportunity He offers us to live in the tension of our paradoxical nature. He knows all our bad and loves us anyway, nothing changes that. And we can't do anything more to make Him love us more than He already does so we are free to just enjoy a loving union with Him. Doing good and living in a way that honors Him not because we can earn any more of his favor or love but because we love him and we want to honor him with our lives.

And as we come to understand his deep and abiding love for us just as we are and we



come to understand that

**BOTTOM SLIDE** We love because he first loved us 1 John 4:19

We are able to love others as we have been loved, forgive as we have been forgiven, bless as we have been blessed.

But to move out of these lands, to live in the tension I must surrender my self loathing and my self righteousness and self sufficiency.

And so as we move in to this final part of the service I want to create some space to do just that.

Hopefully you received a piece of black paper as you came in today. Now I know the color of surrender is white but I also know that when writing the things are causing us shame or pride in our self-righteousness it can be a

little unnerving so thus black.

During the first song, the band will play called I Surrender, I invite you to be still with God to ask Him to reveal to your heart the places of shame, self-righteousness and self-sufficiency he wants to help you be set free from. Write those things you need/want to surrender on that paper. You can then keep the paper as a reminder or you can take it home and burn it, shred it, or whatever.

After that song, we will move in to a time of communion and worship.

But first I'm going to pray over us, this prayer found in the Ragamuffin Gospel.

### **Let's pray**

Prayer for Ragamuffins

"Lord Jesus, we are silly sheep who have dared to stand before You and try to bribe

You with our preposterous portfolios. Suddenly we have come to our senses. We are sorry and ask You to forgive us. Give us grace to admit we are ragamuffins, to embrace our brokenness, to celebrate Your mercy when we are at our weakest, to rely on Your mercy no matter what we may do. Dear Jesus, gift us to stop grandstanding and trying to get attention, to do the truth quietly without display, to let the dishonesties in our lives fade away, to accept our limitations, to cling to the gospel of grace, and to delight in Your love. Amen” (Ragamuffin Gospel, page 139)

## **I Surrender-Band**

### **TRANSITION BY SHANNON**

Let’s pray: Lord we thank you for your offer to move from the lands of self-loathing and self-

righteousness and self-sufficiency to the center of your grace. For it is only in you that we find peace and hope to live in the tension that we are paradoxes. You love us far, far more than we can imagine. You are never surprised by the fact that we stumble. You simply invite us to get back up again and follow in your ways. You invite us to give up the idea that we could earn your love or more favor by trying to being good. You simply invite us into relationship with you where you lead and guide us into transformation, to freedom, to healing. Lord help us to be mindful as we go into this communion time that we are made right, we experience your mercy and grace, because of your sacrifice. Jesus, your body broken for us. Your blood poured on our behalf. Help us to rest in that today. Amen.

At this time, I’d like to ask the communion hosts to come on down. We are going to do

communion a little differently today. You'll come to one of the stations here in the room (or if you are in another viewing location on site you may come in here or to the table in your area). The host will offer you the bread, tear off a piece and then they will offer you the juice to dip it into and then take it and eat. If you are needing gluten free there is a table in the front and the middle of this room that has a bowl with the gluten free option in it.

This is a time for those of you who would like to remember Jesus' sacrifice on your behalf. A time to remind you that your hope is in him.

When communion is complete we will stand and sing one last song as a reminder of the love God has for us.

### **O Come to the Altar-Communion**

### **Reckless Love-Stand and Sing**

### **Benediction**

May you have the power to really understand this week just how wide, how high, how long and how deep is the love of Jesus for you. May you dwell and abide in His deep love, grace and mercy and live your life out of that. Amen

### **Closing comments-Shannon**

Next week's series-First Love  
Early bird golfer deadline  
Teacher Giveaway now live