

What to Do with Your Memories

Isaiah 9:2-7
Luke 2:8-20

December 24, 2017
Faith Community

I have a few travel stories for you this morning, since that's what so many of us are about this time of year.

The first one happened in the winter of 2013. Fran and I were on our way to a conference in Santa Barbara, California. There may be better places to go during February, but I'd be hard pressed to come up with any.

Since our final destination was a smaller airport, we flew nonstop to San Francisco, and then had to head south on one of those small commuter planes, an 'egg beater,' if you will, with a propeller on each side.

We had to walk outside to get on board. The announcer said that it was quite cold out there, so we should wear a coat if we had one. Sure enough, it was in the mid-50s. In February. Context is everything, of course.

So we're out there, waiting to climb the steps, and I'm standing right in front of one of the propellers. Of course there was only one thing to do in a situation like that, so I reached out to give it a little tug and wiggle. Engineering type curiosity, you see. It was then that I heard a voice, as one calling in the wilderness, "Don't touch that!"

It was a familiar voice, one that I'd heard many times before, so I reluctantly got back in line. In the process, however, I couldn't help but notice one detail that required further investigation, so, without touching anything this time, I leaned in to get a closer look.

"Get away from there and get on this plane." She keeps me on a short leash as much as possible. Filled with enthusiastic curiosity, I climbed on, but quickly whispered to my lovely bride, "Did you see that? It looks like there's duct tape on that thing!"

"I don't want to talk about it."

So, in the spirit of scientific inquiry I asked the one and only flight attendant about my observation. Her immediate response:

"Oh yeah, we use it all the time."

I didn't know if that was meant to be reassuring or not, so I was left with the impression that we either had a fun flight attendant or were in for a bumpy ride.

So we settled in the very front row of this little egg beater. Looking around, I thought it would be OK to see what was in the little pocket in front of us, what harm could come of that, and found the usual assortment of things. There was one piece that appeared different from the rest, and, in short order, I realized I had found a treasure. It was the script. You know, how to buckle your belt, what to do if the oxygen masks come down, that kind of thing, and how cool was that?

In my excitement I shared this revelation with my seat mate who for some reason was not impressed at all, and suddenly the keys to the kingdom were grasped from my quivering hands, as I heard another voice say, "Are you going to be trouble?" It was the fun flight attendant, of course, who proceeded with the preflight formalities, using the reacquired script.

Once we were airborne, her seat was right in front looking out over the passenger cabin. I'm sure it was coincidental that I was the passenger in the front row aisle seat, in full view of her ever watchful gaze, and I'd like to think we'd have been good friends in a different context. Maybe.

So there's one travel story. The next two are actually bunched together, so stay with me.

This is my third Christmas as a grandfather. Emilia Jean entered the world in mid-November of 2014. She and her mom and dad were living in Chicago at the time, so they made her first trip to Michigan just five weeks later. On the big day, when Krista texted Fran to let her know they were just fifteen minutes out, I actually put my shoes on and kept them on so I could head out on their arrival.

There's another reason why Christmas of 2014 was special.

My mother had been fighting breast cancer for a couple years, doing quite well, actually, until December of that year, when she ended up hospitalized. So very healthy, it had been 40 years or more since the last time she was an inpatient.

All sorts of issues can gang up on us as we age, and Mom, being 92, had a bunch of them. Maybe the cancer had spread, or maybe not. It could be a gall bladder issue along with a respiratory problem that was newly discovered. Then again, it may involve the liver, and there's a concern with her heart. And so, specialists are consulted, tests ordered or delayed until the latest issue is resolved, and there's that buildup of fluid that naturally happens when someone is bedfast over time. And she was so tired. And she was 92.

One of the things we were looking forward to that Christmas was getting one of those generation photos, with Mom, me, Krista and Millie, and now we weren't sure if we'd be able to do that. For all we knew, Mom might not even make it that far. But for her part, she did so desperately want to meet and hold her one and only great grandchild.

Visitors under the age of thirteen were not being allowed in because of the intense flu season, but the doctors were supportive and encouraging, so I called home with the good news, and Millie was about to travel again.

She got a bath in the kitchen sink, got dressed neat and pretty, and arrived with her entourage in tow, complete with the delightful baby smell.

Krista presented her to Mom, and we watched the wonder unfold. We were all on holy ground. There were sighs, from both baby and great grandma. Kisses were offered on occasion. Blessings were spoken and tears shed, and we did after all get that generational photo we had hoped for.

Krista was seated on Mom's right, and after a few minutes Mom reached across, took my daughter's hand, and pronounced her own benediction:

"Anything can happen to me now that I've seen her." She died three days later.

Unto us a child is born, as the prophet wrote so long ago.

And so we have stories of travel.

- Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem.
- The shepherds did the same, to see this thing which had come to pass.

- Millie journeyed all the way from Chicago, and a day later visited Royal Oak.

All to be used of God to bless people in great need.

Friends, let your memories, even the ones that grieve you, serve to make you strong. I will treasure the Christmas season of 2014 for so many reasons, more than I ever anticipated.

Friends, Jesus Christ came to live among us in human form, and showed us that nothing can separate us from God's love. He is my Savior and my Lord. He can take any situation and transform people in the midst of it. I want you to know that. I want him to be your Savior and Lord.

Memories. They can help or hurt. You can dwell on them or try to pretend some things never happened. You can be forever bitter or you can experience a hard won blessing.

Memories. What do you do with yours?