

“Grateful for the Ride”
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I would like to tell you a story that happened in October of 1911. Now, it's a story about two men, primarily, and their teams. One [man] was Roald Amundsen, and Roald Amundsen was a Norwegian, and another man, Robert Falcon Scott. What a great name: Robert Falcon Scott. (If I had a middle name like Falcon, I would use it too.) Robert Falcon Scott was from Great Britain, and they had their team, as well.

So, you had the Norwegian team and you had the British team. Their goal was more than just self-aggrandizement. They did what they did for their entire nation. Who was going to win? Norway or Great Britain. And, what they were seeking to do in October of 1911, was be the first humans to ever go from the edge of Antarctica, all the way to the center of the South Pole - plop their flag like the United States did on the moon, but do that at the exact center of the South Pole, and go all the way back.

Now today that may not seem all that impressive, but in 1911 think about what that must have been like. They went in October, because in the southern hemisphere that was the beginning of Spring. By the time summer happened, it became so warm in Antarctica that it got all the way up to only 20 below zero. [Laughter.] The problem was that the winds never died down, so if they had ever heard about wind chill, they never would have tried it. But think back to 1911; no one communicated the way they do now. They didn't understand what it would be like, and how they would work, and how they would go so far.

Now the distance between the edge of Antarctica to the center, and to get back alive, was a distance each way of 1400 miles. It would be the equivalent of going from New York City to Chicago, planting your flag and going back. However, you are going with no help. You had to carry everything you had. They didn't have any understanding of where the ice was, where the water might break through - animals, wild animals, polar bears. They didn't even know what it would be like and how they would survive; but they set out and prepared for their journey.

One team made it: the Norwegian team of Roald Amundsen and his crew made it there. They planted their flag and they made it all of the way home. Robert Falcon Scott and the British team made it all of the way there - 34 days after the Norwegians - and never made it home. They died, freezing to death before their journey ended.

I wanted to explain what happened in this journey and what we can learn from it. The first thing that happened was that years - at least 2-3 years - before the actual event occurred, Amundsen decided he needed to learn everything he could about being in a cold weather climate and survive it. So, he went all of the way north, and all of the way to Alaska from Norway, and he went up into his own area in northern Norway - both places - to learn from the indigenous people, and he found from the Eskimo's that they dress differently; they dressed in layers, which no one had ever done before in other parts of Europe, because they found out that you didn't sweat as badly, and if you sweat, it would freeze and you would die.

He [Amundsen] also realized that the Eskimo's never moved quickly. They moved very intentionally - very slowly - but they were able to get more done, because they didn't perspire and they didn't freeze. They also did not over work themselves, because your body cannot respond with more energy, because it is *taking* so much energy to move.

The other thing that he learned in meeting with those groups was about sled dogs. No one - remember you didn't have television, you didn't have Internet - you didn't have any way of seeing how these groups live. So the British and Robert Falcon Scott believed because he was British - and they certainly were the greatest human beings in the history of the world - they didn't need to prepare. Because they, by their very greatness, would overcome any adversity.

The Norwegians were not quite as cocky and they did a little bit better. What they found from the Eskimos, that they had never seen before, were dog sleds. Now, that seems odd today, doesn't it? But that was a unique thing. But, to prove my point, Robert Falcon Scott and the British thought that they could ride horses over the snow and ice. That was 100 years ago and they didn't have any idea, so when the ground was hard, the horses were sliding; and, when it wasn't slippery, their skinny little legs sunk all the way down to the base of their belly in the snow.

He [Amundsen] figured out that their own food might not be enough, so he went and tried, and this is sad now - and I apologize for it being politically incorrect - but they caught dolphins and ate them raw, so they could find out whether they would be able to (A.) Eat them *raw*, (B.) [See] if they would make them sick, (C) Receive enough energy and enough nutrients that they would be able to survive that way if they got separated from their food supply? Sure enough, they were able to.

Finally, Amundsen knew the physical demands, so he rode across the country on his bike. He began to exercise in unique and new ways, and tried to develop his body differently, because it was different to work your body in the cold weather climate, then in a warm weather climate. He had his team do the same thing.

Finally, he sat down with engineers and he thought about how they were going to haul all of the food that they were going to have to take. So, they sat down with engineers and laid out their plan, and it worked to perfection.

The British didn't do any of that. So, by the time they were done, the British had like 7-8 people on their team and they carried twice to three times the amount of food that the Norwegian team - who had 17 people on their crew - and they carried half the food and they were able to have enough food for the entire trip. Here is how they did it: Along the way, they dropped their food each step along the way with a tall flag that was several feet high, and that way they marked their trail going back.

The British tried to put carry everything all the way there, and then have enough and carry what was left all of the way, back on the horses. Well, when the horses broke their legs and then sunk into the snow, these men hauled their own stuff on their back. It's amazing, and it shows that the British are pretty darn stubborn, because they made it all of the way to the South Pole, but they didn't do it with the proper planning. By the time they got there, they were so exhausted and frozen that they never were able to make it back.

Amundsen prepared. He discerned what was necessary to make it all the way there. But, to this day, they were the very first and did it without losing a person - and they all came back healthy and well. The difference was in the planning, and in knowing that other people had ability and skills that they could learn from, and that they could take advantage of.

Now, I am telling you because, in the Bible, at the time of this apocalypse, Jesus was actually telling his disciples that a day will come when everything you think is memorable, everything you held your very life on, is going to go away. How will you prepare yourselves for this new reality?

So, the disciples and apostles walked in. Now realize, that they were all fishermen; they were all farmers; they were rural people from Galilee. None of them had ever been to Jerusalem, Jesus had when he was 12 - but most of the others hadn't been there. So, by the time they came and they saw this amazing city, no wonder they were freaked out and thought, "Look at the boulders, look at the buildings. Nothing could be stronger." And, Jesus had to let them know that what they were putting their hope and their strength in was all going to go away, and they needed to find a new way of surviving and making life.

When we put our hopes, and our dreams, and our trust, in something that won't last there will always be despair. The way to make that change is (1) discernment. Like Amundsen, discerning what we need to do to prepare. We have a Sunday School and a Wednesday night program, so our children will be able to learn how to discern what is real, what is powerful, what will never go away, what they can rely on when everything else crumbles around them - and that is their faith in God. So, when hard times hit them, they will be more resilient. When they are faced with tragedy - unspeakable fears and frustrations - and despair, they will not only survive, they will find a new way. The most important thing in their lives cannot be taken from them - even when so many other things can be: their faith in God, the God who will sustain them.

Sure enough, 40 years later the Temple was destroyed and, as I have said before, remember, the Temple was where God resided. They were sure that if the Temple fell and there was no Holy of Holies - if God had nowhere to reside - would God even exist in this world anymore? Would there be any place for God in this world anymore?

Jesus needed to prepare them to discern that God can find a new way of existing apart from a building - and they not only survived, but they thrived. The Church grew, because they provided hope to people who lost so much.

The second part of that - that we learn and teach - is patience. They had to remember that there were between 35 and 40 years between Jesus death, the destruction of the Temple and when was Jesus coming back. Jesus had left them, and they needed the patience to wait, believing that God had a plan. To be patient, even though they didn't understand what that plan was, to trust. Trust requires patience, because we have to trust in something we don't understand, we don't know and we can't explain. Trust and faith are this close [Scott holds his hands tightly together], because we can't explain it, but we have to be patient enough to trust that God will find a way.

Which leads us to our last part, which is gratitude and love. The way we act while we are being patient, is with gratitude. The moment we remember why we have a God that we worship, we need to be reminding ourselves that this God loves us, this God has cared for us in the past.

That is one of the reasons why we continue to read our Old Testament, and not just our New Testament; because we remembered how God cared for Abraham, how God cared for Moses, how God cared for Rachel, how God cared for David, all the way through. And, if God cared for them, then God will care for me in similar ways. And that carries through to the New Testament, and love. There are always reasons to hate. There are always reasons to be bitter. There are always opportunities to point a finger and say, "This is why I cannot believe." But, what are you left with? Nothing. Because everything will crumble. Remember, this was a people who watched the power of the Roman Empire - thought that it could never go away - and watched it crumble and die. The only thing they had was their faith in God.

How much different are we? Not that much. The only thing we have - the stones will be broken - nothing will remain except our faith in God. The way we retain that faith, amidst the birth pangs of pain in this world, is the discernment to know how to prepare, to be diligent in that preparation, to have the patience, to do the hard work of preparation without giving up, and remaining grateful and loving each step along the way.

When we do that we will be prepared, as Amundsen was. We will not only survive, but we will thrive, because the same Holy Spirit that carried that early church through that difficult time and allowed them to thrive, is the same Holy Spirit that will take our church, our religion, and give it new life and new opportunity, because we *are* the way, the truth and the life through Jesus Christ.

That is our hope and our promise. And may each one of us continue to discern; and, be patient, grateful and loving along the way. Amen.