

INCARNATION as CONVERSATION

The season of Advent invites you and I to a posture of expectant waiting and of preparation for the celebration of the mystery of the incarnation . . . the coming of the long prophesied Messiah as a vulnerable babe to a Bethlehem stable. Heralded by those familiar and heart warming words, "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger," the gospel writers sought to share the good news that "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel'."

It is in this, the incarnation, that our Heavenly Father invites us into the most intimate of conversations. A conversation in which through Immanuel, he reveals his heart of love to us. This is a conversation in which we are encouraged to simply listen, and to allow our whole being to be enveloped by the inner message of the Living Word.

At the time of Jesus' birth, the shepherds were able to engage in it. The wise men participated in the conversation and this led to what would be a life changing journey. Amidst the seeming contradictions, absurdity, and utter confusion of what was being communicated, perhaps it was Mary who most clearly embraced the message, expressed in her response, "I am the Lord's servant . . . may it be to me as you have said."

In contrast, the conversation was not lost on the ears of King Herod. Like many conversations, what Herod heard was filtered through the experiences, assumptions, and priorities that characterized his own heart and life. With horrific consequences, a conversation that was intended to be transformational was experienced as a threat. Herod's abject rejection and spurnful retort of the conversation betrayed his refusal to recognize the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy many years before . . .

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.*

Throughout the history of the Old Testament, and reiterated in the incarnation, the conversation pointed to the establishment of a kingdom characterized by peace, by justice and by righteousness. Far beyond any political deliverance, this kingdom would usher in freedom from the oppression of sin and self interest, reflected in the familiar words of the prophet Isaiah.

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.

Jesus came with a radical demonstration of love and service; an invitation to freedom, a conversation expressing love that extends down through the centuries, a reverberating echo of the angelic hosts' proclamation, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

As we encounter the conversation anew this advent season, might we find ourselves responding as Mary did, with the extravagant language of, "I am the Lord's servant . . . may it be to me as you have said."

In keeping with the theme of conversation and response, I invite you to listen in on a recent conversation with one of the Fairhaven supporters. Their words give expression to the hearts of so many who have faithfully responded to God's invitation to partner in this work over the years. As if in response, the reflections of a couple in kingdom service who have been blessed through their experience at Fairhaven are included.

HOW DID THE ORIGINAL CONNECTION WITH FAIRHAVEN COME TOGETHER FOR YOU?

We feel like we have been a part of Fairhaven since it's inception. We first met Len & Fay Frank (the first Executive Director) when Len was on pastoral staff at Sherwood Park Alliance Church. Our first commitment was to pray. Fairhaven's founding vision of encouraging the health and renewal of Christian leaders gave expression to our passion from the very beginning.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR PASSION FOR THOSE IN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP?

Over the years I've watched missionaries

and ministry people need a safe place to go for help with their life circumstances. In a lot of ways, the 'church or ministry field' can be a very lonely place where confidentiality comes with a high price . . . vulnerable and the need of a safe place. Having a son in full time ministry also gave us first hand appreciation for the profound need. Fairhaven is one answer to this need. I often refer to it as: 'A mountain of miracles, ordained by God!'

In addition to prayer support, God has also called us to help in several very worthwhile



\$186,000 OF THE \$200,000 FOR THE THIRD STAFF RESIDENCE HAS COME IN!



ministries over the years, and we have responded to his calling. We have very tangibly discovered that “For where your treasure is there your heart will be also.” God’s provision over the years has enabled us to be the recipients of His great blessing. In turn, we have learned to not only seek Him but also be obedient to what His Spirit calls us to. We have learned that ‘storing up treasures in Heaven’ is not limited to tithing, but is accomplished by all acts of obedience to Him, thus fulfilling His purposes even when we are unaware of what His purposes entail. Joy, peace and ultimate contentment has always followed. We know too that God doesn’t need our money but He longs to build into our lives as we hear and act upon what He calls us to! We are truly blessed having been part of seeing this mountain of miracles come together and seeing so many people blessed.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SHARE WITH THOSE WHO MIGHT CONSIDER PARTNERING WITH US IN THIS WORK?

My heart longs to encourage others to experience all that God has for their individual blessing, in walking the journey of submission to His calling! I pray that Fairhaven would have many stories to share of God’s faithfulness in leading many people from all walks of life to partner in this furtherance of God’s kingdom purposes through Fairhaven.

As I write, I think of the blessing of two miracles we experienced along the way. The first was standing in the first cottage (the Orchard Cottage) and looking at God’s gift of creation, in the scenic view that we beheld! Only God could have provided and orchestrated such a miracle. The second was much the same . . . realizing the enormity of the ministry possibilities that the completion of The Lodge would enable. There is no end to the faithfulness of God. He is so awesome! All honour and glory be to Him in this provision! It will be wonderful to witness the growth and changes this will bring. Perhaps the thing that excites me most is being able to watch the next generation “catch the vision” and be part of God’s provision as we have been.

RE-FOCUSING THE VISION

As we enter 2016, we do so with a renewed conviction that the Fairhaven story is one of encouraging the health and renewal of Christian leaders. There is a rich storied history in this place. From the purchase of the property with its awe inspiring panoramic views through to our most recent project, the addition of the third staff residence, God’s faithful provision has been beautifully evident.

Beautifully evident also is God’s presence in this place. Guests regularly articulate this as they reflect on their experience here. Rest is being experienced. Renewal is being pursued. Restoration is being achieved. On site, we have the amazing privilege of partnering with Him on a daily basis; of creating a space where He reveals Himself to our guests in deeply transforming ways and then enjoying the “panoramic views” of soul transformation that occurs in the hearts and lives of those who spend time at Fairhaven.

Our vision positions us wonderfully with the growing interest in spiritual formation, the importance of spiritual

RESPONSE

We spent a week at Fairhaven in August, 2015. It was our first visit. After a particularly difficult few years of life and ministry, we were definitely in need of some retreat time. We found the beauty of Fairhaven really good for a type of inner healing that seems to come better when surrounded by nature and silence. Our cottage was beautiful and as nice as any place we have stayed. We enjoyed the breathtaking views of the valley during the day and in the quiet twinkling city lights of the evening as well. The trails on the property were very conducive to clearing of the mind and we even were able to pick fresh fruit at a nearby orchard. The Fairhaven staff have much to offer for weary souls navigating difficult times as well. Retreat is a necessary part of life in ministry and I feel that Fairhaven was a needed blessing in our lives as well as many others. We hope to return again.

Dale (and Rebecca) Dirksen

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rest and renewal, and the intentional focus on attuning one's heart and soul to the still soft voice of the Lord. Through prayer and careful discernment, we invite you to notice how we are attempting to bring together the Fairhaven vision and this growing interest among Christian leaders. For example, in 2016 you will notice a move toward shaping the way our guests engage, enjoy, and experience all that Fairhaven has to offer. This in the form of retreat offerings. Reorienting, for example, the booking of a cottage for specific dates, guests will now be invited to select a retreat option that more intentionally gives expression to their desire for time at Fairhaven. A guest directed retreat with an emphasis on rest and time engaging spiritual practices, for an individual, a couple, or family, may very well prove to be one of the more common of the retreat options. Guests will also be able to select a guided retreat that will engage our staff on a casual basis during their stay as a spiritual guide who will pray with and reflect with them on how God is at work in their life. A third option, a co-directed retreat will intentionally engage our staff in creating a more structured and choreographed retreat experience for those seeking renewal and or restoration in their walk with the Lord. Counselling, coaching, and spiritual guidance will continue to be available as part of the Fairhaven experience. This format of retreat offerings is both a clarification of what our guests have been experiencing at Fairhaven and assists in sharpening our vision and ministry focus. Along with our guests, we too are growing in this journey of spiritual formation. There will likely be questions and adjustments in the implementation and as we further discern God's leading. In the New Year our website will provide details on the retreat options. Stay tuned. We invite you to notice with us!

IN CONCLUSION

As 2015 draws to a close, *thank you* for "your partnership in the Gospel." Here at Fairhaven, we have the wonderful privilege of being stewards of your care and compassion to those in Christian leadership. Your support, whether through prayer, financial gifts, talents and skills shared, inviting others to partner with us, or through referring guests to us, is making a profound difference in the hearts and lives of those called to kingdom service.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, Gwen and myself along with the onsite Fairhaven Team, warm wishes to you and yours this season of Christ-focused conversation.

Blessings,

Tony Schnare
Executive Director

