



The Grand Adventure

Dick Foth

Good morning. I wish my mother could have been alive to have heard that. Thank you; that was fantastic. Well we've heard so much about you and here you are. You live streamers, there you are. If I could give you a gift this morning, I would give you the gift of perspective. For me to stand here is one thing. If I just move down here, which fouls up the cameras or something I'm sure, this is a very different perspective. I'm only three or four feet away. If I move over to the side, it's a very different perspective.

Little kids, toddlers, knee high people have a very different perspective than we have. Ruth and I have the privilege of having four children and eleven grandchildren. The eldest grandchild is 24 and is getting married in about six weeks and the youngest is six. When the 24 year old was three, we were staying at her house and early in the morning, she came and climbed up in our bed. If you are a parent, you're saying *oh no not again* and they're usually wet. If you are a grandparent and they climb up in your bed at 5:30 or 6:00 your saying okay and you're clawing up out of the darkness.

She said, "Let's talk."

I said, "Okay what do you want to talk about?"

She said, "I'm going to have a baby sister." Now her mom was pregnant and they didn't know the sex of the child.

I said, "Well, it could be a brother."

She said, "Yeah, but I want a sister."

I said, "Okay. Why don't we think of some names? Why don't we call the baby Boogalooney?" She looked at me. I said, "How about Zongabongawonga?" She started to chuckle. I said, "Why don't we call the baby Yabaslabavich?"

She just howled and said, "Oh, Grandpa, those are boy names."

What do I know?

If you think little kids have a different perspective, you ought to try Jesus. He comes at life in a way that life should be come at. That's not even a sentence right there, but he comes at it in a totally different

way. And what he brings us is full life, overflowing life and adventure.

My first memory is one of adventure. When I was two, my parents had gone to a conference where a single lady missionary stood up and said... This is 1944. She stood up and said, "I want a man for India." As a response to that, my parents, in 1945, took my sister and me across the country to catch a ship. In the summer of 1945, right after the end of the Second World War, we went to India and we spent the next four years in India. But on June 10, 1945, we went to a parade. On May 17th, a surrender had been signed by Nazi Germany in Europe and the Allied Supreme Commander was coming home. His name was Dwight David Eisenhower. They had a parade in New York City, the largest parade ever held even to this day in New York City. There were four million people on the streets who wound 37 miles through all of the burrows and if I could describe it to you, I would. My dad was there taking 16 millimeter colored films. Why don't I just show you. This is June 10, 1945.

[Video plays]

As he came by 5th Avenue, New York's finest in their dress blues rode by and then the band and then the man himself, standing up in the back of a gray convertible, waving at the crowds. My father took pictures as he came down the avenue. He swung around and as he panned the crowd, he came over to a mom and a little boy right there in the corner and that's me right there. I was very cute. But after 73½ trips around the sun, stuff happens. Stuff falls out; your shoulders slide down around your waist and you're trying to lift it up, get it back, tuck it in; your trying to do all these kinds of things, but here we are nevertheless.

But that, for me, is the start of adventure. And when you choose to follow Jesus, that's, in fact, what it's about. My text this morning is found in John 1: 35. Jesus has a relative six months older than he. His name is John the Baptist. He was a wild man. He lived out in the desert; he ate crazy stuff, dressed in funny ways, and was just confronted to say the least. John had his own group. He was getting his disciples together. This story tells about a second day where he was by the Jordan River.

This is how it reads. **35 The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. 36 When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"**

37 When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. I'm thinking it's not good if you're trying to get your own group together and some other guy comes by and you just know him and they follow him, unless you want your guys to follow Jesus. Then we're good. So that's what's happening here.

38 Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" See, now this messes with my head because I think he's God, right? A lot of people don't think Jesus is God, but I think he's God, so I think he should know what they want. Why does he do that? He engages them. There's that story in the gospels where the blind person comes. "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on..." Remember that story? They bring him to Jesus and Jesus says, "What do you want me to do?" Well he's blind for Pete's sake. Why don't we start there and I'm not making fun; I'm just saying why does he do that?

I think he does it because he wants us involved in the adventure. He wants us to be part of his kingdom and not just observe it and take notes. He wants us to be engaged.

They said, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?” Well, he doesn’t tell them. They don’t ask him a theological question; they don’t ask him a science question like “How do you make the sun come out?” They don’t ask him some deep question on philosophy or social justice. All they ask him is where are you staying? And I’m asking why. That’s one of my favorite questions: why? It’s like a two year old’s question. They always ask questions. Finally, you say because. They ask where he’s staying and he doesn’t tell them. He doesn’t say, “I’m staying in the next village. If you come to the well where the women gather and take a left and go down two blocks and go right to the third house, I’ll be there.” He doesn’t say that. All he says is this. ***39 “Come,” he replied, “and you will see.”***

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon

I would submit to you that that’s what he says to all of us when we connect with him in some way. We say, “Where you going” and he says, “Come I’ll show you.” “What’s going to happen?” “You’ll see.” “Who am I going to meet?” “You’ll find out.” What amazes me about this text is what he doesn’t say. What he doesn’t say is “If you can guess who I am, you can be in my group.” Why doesn’t he say that? I think he doesn’t say that because we discover who he is as we go.

That’s how life is. You’re born and here’s this little baby in the womb and he or she is floating around in that water womb world. All of the sudden, I feeling pressure in there and all of the sudden, it’s really a tight squeeze and bam, out I come and then I’m upside down and there are giants and bright lights. You don’t have to hit me; I’ll cry, just so you know. Here I am and it’s a totally different... and they are speaking funny languages. I discover not only what that world is as I go, but I discover who I am, I discover who the giants are. That’s what I discover as I go. Can it be much different in a spiritual birth and a spiritual growth? I think not.

Here is the God who says I believe you have ultimate worth. Within the last two weeks, we’ve had this horrific tragedy in Paris and before that, there was a plane blown out of the sky over the Sinai Peninsula. Brussels, as we speak, is shut down. There are no subways running. The whole city is locked down for fear of terrorism from a group of people who say you have no value. “I don’t even have to know who you are; I’ll shoot you.” Jesus comes along and says, “Come with me. If you go that way, you go there and die.” Jesus comes along and says, “Come with me and live because you have absolute worth.”

People say, “Yeah, but I don’t feel like I’m worth much.” Well there’s a difference between feeling unworthy and being worthless. Jesus comes along and says, “Yeah, you have reason to feel unworthy for this and this and this, but why don’t we take care of that because you are not worthless. You indeed have value.” These guys who are following weren’t following an idea or an ideology, they were following a person.

I have three things to say about what “Come and you’ll see” looks like. Just three things and a few stories and then we’re out. We’ll go have popcorn or roast beef or whatever you’re going to do.

Jesus is the Center

The first thing is that in this journey, Jesus is the center. He's not an app for my iPhone; he's the operational system of my life. He's the center. It's not about a system. It's not about a doctrine. It's not about the structure. It's about a person.

Ruth and I spent 15 years in Washington, D.C. I'm a kid from East Oakland, California and I'm way over my head in Washington, D.C. The first time I'm walking down the hall to... Our role in Washington, D.C. was to befriend folks. Some of you know what Young Life is. Young Life is this group and they have sort of a mantra: "Come alongside and earn the right to be heard." Well the thing in D.C. was sort of an adult Young Life. You come alongside and earn the right to be heard with people in places of leadership. Many of you know the higher you go in any discipline, whether it's health care or the military or education, the higher you go, the more competitive it gets and the more competitive it gets, the closer you play your cards. And when you play your cards close, by the time you get to the top of the heap, you end up with a thousand acquaintances and no friends. Leadership isn't hard because you have to make decisions, that's what leaders do. Leadership is hard because you don't know who to trust. So our function in Washington was to befriend folks and, over time, earn their trust, hopefully.

But I was nervous as a cat the first time I went to meet with a senator because I'm no blue blood. I didn't graduate from Yale or Harvard. My family doesn't have big money. I'm walking through one of the buildings there where the senators are – Dirksen or Hart or one of those – and I'm having a conversation with the Lord, saying "I'm a little nervous here" and he's saying "I know" and so we're going along and I said, "What do I say? I felt like he said this. It wasn't like a voice, but I got this impression. He just said "Foth..." He calls me Foth. He said, "Foth, when you speak to the King of the universe in the morning, it's not so tough to speak to a United States Senator in the afternoon. I said, "Okay."

It isn't about my credentials. It's about his credentials. That's how this works. So when you align yourself with Jesus, when you follow Jesus, people are interested in that. They are not interested in Christianity as a system. People ask, "Why are you trying to get people to switch systems like from Islam to this or Judaism to that or Shintoism...?" This isn't about a system or a structure. This is about a person getting to know a person, being engaged by a person.

If I take you to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., there are 40 to 50 million books and way more than that with artifacts and things. There are more books about this 33-year-old Jewish rabbi, carpenter, execute by the state 2,000... There are more books about him than anybody else. Napoleon and Abraham Lincoln are a distant second. Why, in the most powerful country ever on the face of this planet are there more books about this young guy, this millennial, if you will, executed by the state 2,000 years ago? Part of it has to be his ideals, but part of it is his story. The core of it is his story.

I had a fella ask me... He's sort of a high-powered attorney in D.C. He said, "Dick, if a guy wanted to be a reissuance man, do you think he should know something about the Bible?"

I said, "Well, you know, it's a best seller..."

He said, "Where would a fella start?"

I said, "Well there are two parts; there's the old part and the new part and in the new part there are these four fellas that write about this person, Jesus. Why don't you read that and then we can talk."

He said, "Okay, I'm going to Martha's Vineyard," which is sort of a high end resort place off the coast of Massachusetts, "I'm going to go for a week and then I'll come back and we'll talk."

So two weeks later, we're sitting there at the Old Ebbitt Grill, across from the Whitehouse, and I asked him what he thought.

He said, "You know, I read those four guys. Very interesting. Those first three guys are a lot alike (Matthew, Mark, Luke)." When you go to seminary, they say those are the synoptic gospels; they have one view. He said, "But that fourth guy, John, he's a lot different."

I know guys that have spent \$40,000.00 to find that out. All he did was go to Martha's Vineyard for a week and just sort of read the gospels. I said that once and a business guy came up and said "Same price tag." But when you look at Jesus at the center, he is so engaging and his ideas are so powerful. Even if a person didn't think he was God, his ideas are powerful.

I'm a five-year-old boy standing on a street corner, high in the tea plantations of South India in 1947, watching the British Empire march out of India. I have a little Indian flag in one hand and a little British flag in the other. There was this lawyer guy, not a big guy; a little guy by the name of Mohandas Gandhi who took one idea of Jesus and chased the whole British Empire out of India. He took this idea... If somebody slaps your face, what are you supposed to do? When was the last time you saw that happen? I'm reading that and I'm saying, "Well, that ain't American. John Wayne would never do that. He'd gun you down in the name of the Lord." He'd say, "Take that, pilgrim." Why would Jesus say something like that? That sounds strange. Why would he say that? He's not a masochist. Well, the guy doing the slapping is saying, "Come out and play by my rules" and Jesus is saying, "I have a whole different range of rules in this kingdom of mine. This kingdom has a different way of looking at life."

When you follow Jesus, he's very disturbing. If you want to be comfortable, don't follow Jesus because he will turn your world upside down. He will change how you see people, how you see yourself, and it won't happen like that; it will change on the journey. That's how it is.

My tendency, though, is to add stuff to him. I want to add my program or my structure or my thoughts. I was invited to a golf tournament some years ago in Southern Virginia. I'm not a great golfer. I like golf. I'm an avid golfer, but I ain't good; let me put it that way. How many of you would identify with that thought that I just had? But we spend big money doing something that makes us mad. Our eldest daughter sent me a Christmas card some years ago and said, "Dad, we were going to get you some of those new long distance golf balls, but we decided we wouldn't want you to walk any farther into the woods than you already walk."

So I'm at this golf tournament and it's young executives who are believers inviting other young executives who aren't believers, but they like to hit the long ball. They get three rounds of golf over three days at a really nice course. But before each round, somebody gives a 20-minute talk about Jesus. Well, even Joe Pagan is willing to put up with 20 minutes of Jesus for three and a half hours of long ball. You could just suck it up or doze off or check your apps or do something.

So 30 minutes before one of these sessions, they said, "Would you give the talk about Jesus?"

I said, "Okay, like on what part?"

They said "How about the simplicity of Jesus?"

So I'm walking into the drink tent and they've got everything from Poland Spring Water to Johnny Walker Red in this drink tent. I'm thinking about what I'm going to talk about and I had this hunch. Sometimes you get a hunch that turns out to be the leading of the Holy Spirit like a Holy Spirit thought. So I grabbed a water and I grabbed a can of Coca Cola.

I said, *There are lots of images for Jesus in the gospels. There's the door, the shepherd, the vine, the bread, but one of them is water. This is water; it's a very simple formula. It's two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen. Your body is two-thirds water. If you don't get water for five days, you die. This Coca Cola uses water and if you work for Coke, I'm with you; gotta love this. But Coca Cola uses water; it's formula is an unbelievable formula. I don't have it exactly but it's H98C134... It has everything from phosphorus to... It has all kinds of stuff in it. If you put a nail in Coke, it will be gone in three days. I have gained hundreds of pounds drinking this. If you drink too much of this, it will kill you because it's toxic. You put water on your roses. You do not put Coke on your roses. You wash your car with water. You don't wash your car with Coke. You take a bath in water. You don't take a bath in Coke. Why is that? It's because Coke leaves crud and corruption and gunk and all kinds of stuff. Water is a cleansing agent. When you add stuff to Jesus, you don't make him better; you dilute him. And sometimes, you can even make him toxic. There is the Jesus who comes along and it's just "Follow me, pure and simple. Let's do this. Let's go adventuring together and I'll show you and authentic life, abundant and overflowing."*

Friendship is the way.

Why did he die? Well we heard it this morning; we sang it. "Jesus paid it all; all to him I owe." But what was the mechanism, why did they get after him? Well, he was friends with the wrong people. It says that Jesus is a friend of sinners. Aren't you grateful that Jesus is a friend of sinners? That means we get in. He comes and hangs out with us, this Jesus. When he walks with us, it's a powerful thing.

I think *friend* is one of the most powerful words in the entire world. I have a friend; his name is Gordon Fee. Gordon Fee is a New Testament scholar and he said "Life is a wilderness; we're just making our way through it." We're trying to do the best we can.

Some of you are hunters here. I'm not a hunter. I'm a guy from Oakland, California and I don't know about hunting. But I understand that if you're a hunter, a map doesn't do you much good unless you

know where you are for starters. And a compass only generally helps you. What you need when you are in the wilderness, a place you've never been before, is a guide. You need someone who has been that way before. Jesus comes to do that and he comes along and he engages me and he says, "Foth, I'm going to my Father's house and you don't know the way. Why don't you come?" And I start following him.

When you make a friend, you have the spirit of Jesus in you if you're following him. If I'm out here wandering around and you befriend me and say "Why don't we have coffee or why don't we go bowl some lines or why don't we go do this or that or the other" and I start hanging with you, when I get you as a friend, I automatically get Jesus. Jesus says "He who receives you" – Matthew 10: 40 – "receives me and receives the one who sent me." So when somebody gets you as a friend, they get the whole Trinity all at one shot. Now I don't know that when you befriend me. I think I'm just having Starbucks with you. I don't know Jesus is there. But as I watch you and I see how you respond to things and how you love your family and how you treat people, I'm starting to ask questions like "Why do you think like that?" "Where did you get that?" If you follow Jesus very far, he takes you to the cross and he'll take you to poor people and to kids along the way. From the gospels, that seems to be how it works.

Our daughter, Jenny, worked for United States Congressman for four years as an office manager. Her boss, the Chief of Staff... Chiefs of Staff run Capitol Hill. If you don't get past the Chief of Staff, you don't get to see the Congressman or the Senator. He's a retired Navy submarine captain and he and the Congressman went all over the world to places where there were profound religious freedom issues and human rights issues. They went where the bombs were dropping and the bullets were flying. For 16 years, they did that. His name was Charlie and he was tall, ramrod straight, sort of an uncle to the staff because the hill was populated by 20 somethings, the best and the brightest. He was an uncle to them.

One day they were overseas, the congressman and Charlie, and they were at a refugee camp in Sierra Leone where horrific things had happened in that country. You had young moms who had their arms chopped off to intimidate them... Just terrible things going on. Charlie felt a pain in his hip. He came back and went to Johns Hopkins University Medical Center in Baltimore and found out he had a virulent form of cancer in his hip. They didn't know if they could stop it, but they said they needed to do a hip replacement.

Now the congressman was a real lover of Jesus and Charlie really loved the congressman. He was his friend, but he wasn't buying the Jesus part. He just couldn't go there for whatever reason. Well, Charlie was waiting for a hip replacement. He was in his home in Vienna, Virginia and our daughter was resigning from the office to go with a group called World Vision to West Africa. She said, "Before I go, Dad, I would like to go see Charlie."

This was a Sunday afternoon in a snowstorm. We drove out there, walked in... We were just going to stay 15 minutes. We stayed two hours because Charlie wanted to talk about God. We had a little prayer at the end and left. Jenny hugged him, said, "I love you," and walked out.

I asked Charlie if I could come see him again in a few days and he said sure. So on Friday, I went back in and I walked in and the first thing Charlie says to me is "Dick I don't think I can do this without God."

I said, "I'm with you."

He said, "What do I need to do?"

I said, "Why don't you just give your whole life to him?"

He said "Okay. I just have one question. I haven't paid any attention to God for 64 years. If I come to him now when I could be checking out, isn't he going to be mad?"

I said, "Charlie, you have adult children. What if one of them wandered off and just blew everything and spoiled the family name and he or she called you up and just said 'Dad, I really messed up; I just want to come home. I just want to spend time with you. Could I just come home and we just watch movies and eat popcorn and just hang out and I'll just get to know you and sort of make up for lost time,' how would you feel about that?"

He said, "I'd love that!"

I said, "Well, if you, as an imperfect earthly father feel that, how much more would a perfect heavenly father tell you to come on?"

He said, "Okay, what do I do?"

I said, "Well, let's pray."

He said, "How do you do that?"

I said, "Well, it's just like talking to me, but you can't see him." He hesitated so I asked him if he would like me to help him. I told him "I will say some phrases I think you feel and why don't you just follow me out loud in prayer?"

I said, "Dear God, this is Charlie." He repeated it. And as I'm just getting ready to say the second phrase, Charlie takes off.

He said, "Oh God, I've screwed the whole thing up here..." He just poured his guts out for the next two minutes and it threw me off because... Don't you hate it when somebody just busts out and tells the truth? I had a good prayer kind of all prepared. Then he just stopped. He didn't say amen and we all know if you don't say amen, it doesn't work.

He just slid back in his chair when he was done and said "Okay, now what?"

All of the sudden, he was the Navy submarine captain ready for the mission. I said, "Well, your wife has prayed for you all these years..." She's a wonderful lady. She flew United Airlines every week. She was a first class attendant to Europe.

He said "Mary, come in here." She came in and he said, "Mary, I have just given my whole life to God, through Jesus Christ. I have embraced him fully and willingly under no stress or duress from Dick." Mary liked that.

It's amazing what a friend does in your life if he just walks with you and loves Jesus. It's amazing what happens on the backstroke to the persons who hangs out with you when you let them see it rather than just giving them a verse. Those 11 disciples, those 12 ultimately didn't have any verses when Jesus left. They didn't have John 3: 16 or Romans 3. I wonder how that worked without the verses. I think it worked because when the spirit of God is in you, you sort of make verses as you go. That's what happened with them, but the simple point I'm making is that there is something about friendship when you care for someone unconditionally and you stick with them in the hard times. Most guys run away in the hard times. That's what Frank had done with Charlie.

Long story short, Ruth and I were invited to... A friend was becoming head of the Navy and he said "Come down. There's going to be a change of command." We went down to Norfolk, Virginia, the largest naval base in the world, and sat on the deck of the big E, the USS Enterprise aircraft carrier. They have this thing in the Navy. Some of you are military and I don't know how they do it in other services. But the Navy has the Bosun's Whistle and then they announce on the loud speakers "Attention all hands" and they pipe the person aboard, not by their name or rank, but by the entity he or she commands. So they said, "Atlantic Second Fleet arriving" and the admiral comes up and sailors snap to attention and the band plays. Then they say, "Atlantic Fleet..." Our friend was what they call CINCLANTFLT, head of the Atlantic Fleet. He came up. Then they had US Navy arriving and it was Richard Danzig, Secretary of the Navy. I understand that when the President of the United States boards any vessel anywhere on the planet, the loud speaker says "Attention all hands, the United States of America arriving."

Sitting on the deck that day, I had this flash of Jesus coming to Bethlehem and on that day it was "Kingdom of God arriving." That's how it was.

I went to my friend Vern who is now head of the whole Navy and I said, "Vern, you've got a sailor who is struggling with cancer."

He wrote a note:

Dear Charlie, please know that several of us in the fleet are standing with you in these stormy days as you go through rough waters.

Your brother,

Admiral Vern Clark.

I took it to Charlie and he loved that. He kept it at his bedside. Some weeks later, Charlie was fading. He was in hospice. I took the congressman and we were with him. We just said, "Charlie, I think Jesus, that you started to follow, is going to come get you in a few days."

He said, "I think so. I think so."

I said, "You're going to turn around a couple times and I think Frank and I are going to show up... hopefully we'll show up."

He said, "That'd be great." We had a prayer and we left. As we walked out of the room, he said, "Love you guys." That's the last thing I heard him say.

When I stood by his grave at Arlington Cemetery, with a full honors ceremony with the caisson and the horses, they folded the flag and gave it to Mary and the bugler started to play down at the tree line. I had this thought that when Charlie arrived in heaven, it might have sounded something like this: "Attention all hands, Charles Evans Hughes White, US Navy Captain retired, follower of Jesus, child of God arriving."

Friendship takes you places. Friendship with Jesus and friendship with his followers takes you places you never thought you could go.

Kindness is the currency.

Kindness is the currency of the kingdom. There's this great word in the Old Testament that's a Hebrew word; it's *chesed*. It means loving kindness. It's this expression of the heart of God. I asked two 89 year olds a question within a few weeks of each other: "Looking back on your life, what's the greatest quality somebody can have?" Both of them, without hesitation, instantly said kindness. Kindness is not niceness. Kindness is this concrete expression of the heart of God. It's not syrupy; it's this real thing that has a solidity to it that nothing else has.

I shared the North Platte Story; you've heard from the pastor that I did that, but I'd like to say that again for a moment, if you will. A friend of mine gave me this book by Bob Green, a sports writer from Chicago, called *Once Upon a Town*. It's a fascinating book. You can get it online.

Six hundred and thirty five miles from here to the Northeast is the town of North Platte, Nebraska. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Within two weeks, we started moving troops across the United States, mostly by train. And the northern tier parallels Interstate 80 now going across there and the hub for the Union Pacific Railway was the town of North Platte, Nebraska. At the time, it was a town of 12,000 people. There are no passenger trains that go through North Platte now, but they have the largest freight yards in the world in North Platte, Nebraska; they are called the Bailey Yards.

A young drug store clerk by the name of Rae Wilson, 26 years old, had this thought. She heard some Nebraska guardsmen were coming through on this first train. It was Christmas day if I'm not mistaken. She said, "I'm going to make some cookies and take some apples and get some of my girlfriends and we'll go down and give them some stuff." So they went down there and it turned out to be Kansas boys, not Nebraska boys, but they gave them their cookies anyway. She had this idea. She organized women. She started organizing women for 100 miles around North Platte, Nebraska to meet the trains. Lots of trains were coming through and the US Army said every train could stop for ten minutes.

The Union Pacific gave them an old defunct restaurant and they dubbed it the North Platte Canteen. The women in the communities would make stuff from scratch. Everything was rationed. Gasoline was rationed. Sugar, flour, everything was rationed. So everything was made from scratch. One lady said, "My job in that canteen was to make ten angel food cakes a week from turkey egg whites in the back of that train station." Every train that came through got a birthday cake. And if nobody had a birthday, they would say "Sargent Jones, today is your birthday." That's how it worked. They didn't have paper ware so they took their coffee in mugs and got on the train, drank the coffee, put the mugs off at the next station, and the next train coming east would bring them back to the station. These guys would hop off the train, run in there for ten minutes, and there was cold milk and fresh pie and ham and cheese sandwiches and hot coffee. They put the young girls on the platform and then the older women were in the back. What are they thinking?

When Bob Green interviewed these older men, now octogenarians, about their time in the war and he said North Platte, Nebraska, these men often times would start to weep. He would ask them what they were weeping for and the story would be similar to this: *I grew up in Brooklyn and had never been out of the city. I graduated high school on a Friday, enlisted on a Monday, and by Wednesday, I'm on a train heading west in an Army uniform, eating k-rations, sitting up for three days and nights. In the middle of the night, the announcement came "Ten minutes to North Platte." I had no idea what a North Platte was. We jumped off these trains and ran into that station. When we ran into the station, there were girls that looked like our sisters and our cousins and women that look like our mothers and our aunts and there was this fresh food, these fresh sandwiches, these ham and cheese and these pheasant sandwiches in season.*

I told this story at the Nebraska Governor's prayer breakfast some years ago and a state senator came up to me afterwards and said, "My mom worked in that train station during that time and sometimes it was pheasant sandwiches out of season."

We ran in there and we had ten minutes. We ate as fast as we could. Somebody played piano and we would grab a girl and dance with her for a couple of minutes and then run back out the door. They would give us hugs on the way out and whisper in our ears "God bless you, sailor," "God bless you soldier." "We're praying for you." Here we were 18 and 19 years old. We'd get back on this train going to God knows where, not knowing if we would ever come back alive, but for ten minutes in the middle of night in a place we'd never been with people we'd never met, somebody was kind to us."

Six million United States service men went through North Platte, Nebraska in those five years. And their common theme was "somebody was kind to us."

Romans 2: 4 says it this way: ***Be careful how you judge things. Remember the tolerance, the patience, and the kindness of God because it's his kindness that leads you toward repentance.***

So here's the deal. He said, "Come, follow me and I will not only make your fishers of men, but I will take you places that you never dreamed you could go. I will give you ideas you never thought you could have. And I'll give you friends that last forever."

I told the North Platte story at the 60th anniversary of a group called Youth for Christ Campus Life and afterwards, the next morning, a young girl came up to me and said "I'm a staffer in Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania and you were talking about North Platte and I had this thought. I wonder if my grandpa went through North Platte. So I called my mom and said, 'What do you think?' She said, 'I don't know honey; why don't you call your grandpa.'" She said he grandpa was in a nursing center and he has dementia. "He doesn't know who he is half the time, let alone where he is. I called him last night and I established who I was. I said 'Grandpa, does the name North Platte, Nebraska mean anything to you?'" Instantly, he was lucid. He said, 'North Platte, Nebraska? You bet it does. That's the place where I went in and they had cold milk and fresh apple pie and they shined my shoes. I will never forget North Platte, Nebraska.'" "For ten minutes in the middle of the night at a place I'd never been with people I'd never met, someone was kind to me."

When you follow him, he's the center. When you follow him, you don't follow him alone; friends walk with you. And when you follow him, kindness is the key; radical, authentic kindness is the key. We say "Jesus, where you going?" He says, "Come, you'll see."

Father, thank you for your grace this morning. Thank for the people that you've put in our lives that walk with us as we follow you. Help us not to ever forget them. They are the people you gave to us that when we wandered off and fell in the creek, they came and got us, brought us back, and got us on track.

Save us from adding stuff to you so that you get diluted and the world can't see a clear picture of who you really are. Above all, let us major in kindness in a world that's guarded, in a world that's frightened to death these days. May our radical kindness be light in a dark place.

In Jesus' name we pray... Amen.