

# President's Commentary



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## A Motorcycle Ride Congregation

It was an August Sunday morning, and I had no churchly responsibility that morning. So when the invitation came my way to be a part of the community, I was excited to say, “yes.” (I am grateful for many congregations which offer Saturday evening services.) The invitation was to say a few words and have a prayer for the Branden Ramey Memorial Ride. Branden was killed in Iraq in 2004 and was a resident of our hometown: Belvidere, Illinois. Each year his family and friends raise money for his scholarship, which benefits students at our local high school.

The “congregation” this warm and sunny Sunday was not the regular crowd I am used to addressing. They were ready to ride their motorcycles. In total there were about 300 ready to go. We met at the local bowling alley and gathered in the parking lot. Stacey welcomed everyone and said a few words as she reflected on Branden, the one whom she had intended to marry. To remember him, she organizes this yearly ride.

Then, it was my turn. I was watching the crowd as she introduced me. I could almost hear them wonder, “What is he doing here? How long will this last?” I thanked the organizers and honored our veterans and first responders who were gathered.

These are not always easy times to be involved in the community. I had been given an opportunity. We can take advantage of these opportunities without compromise or say a few trite words that are empty.

Well, we were there because Branden’s life mattered. His family mattered and those who gathered there matter. We not only matter to each other, but we matter to God. We matter in this life, and we matter eternally. Branden was a national and community hero. Because we matter to God, Jesus Christ came to this broken and sinful world, to give himself. Jesus is more than a hero, He is Savior. I said, “He is your Savior.”

We had a prayer for safety, that God would bless our nation and those in danger and their families, and for our nation. We thanked God for Branden’s life and our own lives. We asked God to help us in our weaknesses and brokenness through Jesus. Our prayer on the black asphalt was prayed in Jesus’ Name. Then, we prayed together the Lord’s Prayer. And those motorcyclists prayed out loud—I could hear them pray!

How did we end? Well, with the Aaronic Blessing. With my arms raised as we do in worship, “The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you, the Lord look on you with favor and give you peace.” (Numbers 6:23,24)

Off they went, with engines blaring loudly. As I walked away, one man came up to me and said, “Thank you, that was very nice.” I overheard one man say to another, “Well, I’ve been to many rides. We have never done that before.”

Our communities outside the church are messy. (Yes, the church can be quite messy also.) There are great needs out there. The religious ideas are strange. Bible-believing, Christ-confessing Christians are often misunderstood and maligned. But like Jesus, we take the Gospel out of our buildings. We do as our Savior has done. We gather to receive His gifts, and then—overflowing—we scatter.

I’ve noticed that sometimes invitations come our way after people get to know us. They notice that we really care about them. Once we become “safe” they may ask as I was asked. We do what we do, because Jesus did what He did for us and the world. When dealing with the community outside the church, I often remember the words of a sainted Seminary Professor, “Let Christ offend.” By that I understood we should not look for ways to offend to show we are right, but let the Word of God and message of Jesus do its work. Speak the Word of God—that is where the power is.

Relationships do matter! Be a good neighbor; love your neighbor. Be trustworthy. Let the community know you care. Your family cares. Your congregation is there for those inside and those outside, we serve as Christ’s people.

It’s messy, but Jesus remains our Beautiful Savior. He makes us Holy and His beautiful people too, through the forgiveness of sins!

Blessings,

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