

4/28/20 – Article #11

Good Morning Brothers and Sisters,

It is Monday and it is, indeed, a good morning. By the time you read this it probably won't be morning for you, and it won't be so good with rain coming on Tuesday. I won't finish today because the sun is shining brightly and regardless of my desire to write to you and the wetness from all the weekend rain, I will want to be outside working soon.

I've been thinking about these messages I send you. I wish I could deliver them in person. I imagine them as if I were. In my mind I think of them as fireside chats; as if you were here in our living room by the fireplace and we were simply talking with one another as brother to brother, as friend to friend. I try to picture you here (perhaps not all at once... it would be a bit crowded, like sardines in a can). While you are here, notwithstanding the troublesome condition of the world about us, we are at peace even as we converse about the challenge of the present distress, reminisce of better times, plot strategies to deal with the crisis, and encourage one another to face the future with resolve and assurance.

The idea of a fireside chat is not original with me. I was reflecting back to the time when President Franklin Roosevelt delivered radio broadcasts to the nation from March of 1933 in the depth of the Great Depression to June of 1944 near the end of World War II. Roosevelt capitalized on the recent development of radio communications. People were attracted to the radio like people are today to their cell phones. There was a ready and eager audience for any kind of broadcast and the nation eagerly tuned in to the President's addresses. Roosevelt avoided using flowery oratory, but used the same speech that he would if he were conversing with close friends. The messages enabled the President to set forth his perceptions of the nation's condition, explain his policies, and, regardless of whether the people agreed with them or they were correct, give direction through a storm. They had the effect of calming a troubled nation. I guess that is something like what I have in mind when I write to you: use social media to communicate preparedness and calm...perhaps whether I have them or not☺.

President Roosevelt did not have a fire; neither did he sit by a fireplace. He sat at his desk with a microphone on it. The fireside had to be imagined. They could have been in the hearers' living room as well as the speaker's. You are not in our living room, you cannot see the fireplace or the gas fire that is in it, you cannot see my face (not a great loss), and you cannot even hear my voice, but you can use your imagination. As you read try to think of yourself here in our home, relaxed and at peace for the moment, as we carry on a conversation, however one-sided it is.

Today I've been thinking about the idea of encouragement. We are getting a lot of that these days. We have Ryan, Jerry, Keith, Pat, and Jamie working diligently to keep our spirits bolstered. Encouragement seems needed constantly as it consumes like toilet paper off the store shelves. In times of a major crisis, especially one that does not go away quickly, yesterday's encouragement can fade quickly into today's distress. In this present distress our need for encouragement seems similar to our need for the Word of God; it must be fed upon frequently. Crises call for frequent reminders: an exposition and analysis of the facts; continuing updates; a

call to arms, as it were; and last, but not least, words of inspiration or encouragement. Unfortunately, the encouragers sometimes do not feel like encouraging.

I think it would be a mistake to think that those who are encouraging you daily do not themselves sometimes feel discouraged; that they do not have their low moments and fears; that they also need to be encouraged. The words that I write are as much to myself as to you. I sometimes feel myself drifting into a kind of malaise. I have to catch myself and not let it happen. It is then that I think about all the things I must do to prevent myself from falling into a pit of self-pity, fear, anxiety, and/or discouragement. It does not stay with me long, but it arises often enough. Fortunately, I have lived long enough to feel it; to recognize when it is happening; to know what I must do about it. Perhaps this is one of the few advantages of getting old. Every strategy I use to cope with the negative emotions; all the things I think about to prevent inching in the direction of anger, frustration, or anxiety form the foundation for what I write.

If my words ever seem strong; if ever they seem resourceful; if ever they seem unaffected by the trial we are in, remember it is not me, but the Lord who makes it appear that way. We all have an opportunity to see, know, feel, and acknowledge what Paul did and, as strange as it may seem to us, took pleasure in. He wrote, "Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2Cor. 12:10)." If nothing else comes from this time in history, we should be made quite aware of our weakness. But if we remain in and follow the Shepherd, we will be strong.

Therefore, friends and brethren, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might (Eph. 6:10)."

Jim and Sharon hope and pray the best for you all.