

## A Community of Ripple Effects

By R. Maurice Smith

Written and Posted 3-15-12

© Rising River Media

### On A Personal Note

This letter on “spectacles” in the Church is the result of several things, not the least of which is the personal situation of my friend, John, who has been part of our house church family for several years. I would describe John as “Mr. Conscientious”. He has worked since the age of 15 and cared for two elderly parents until their deaths. He spent 10 years driving bus for the local transit company, until 2 years ago when God told him to “step off the bus”. Our house church family knows John as a faithful and gifted intercessor with the heart of a servant - a true “deacon”. Many people have prayed over John’s situation over the past two years, asking the simple question, “What do you want John to do? Should he go back to work or should he wait”. The consistent answer has been, “No, just wait”. In the process, John has become a “spectacle” of the variety that reflects 1 Corinthians 4 and rattles the paradigm of many believers. John is now in need of a place to live (house sitting, guest room, etc.) as both he and we pray for God’s next step. If you are aware of anything in the Spokane area, let me know via “REPLY”. Thanks, Maurice.

### A Kingdom of Spectacles And Ripples

I’m spending time this morning thinking about “spectacles and ripples”. This thought thread actually began when we were in Maui and I was reading David Platt’s book, “Radical”. Platt’s book is an unavoidable indictment of the “non-radical” nature of so much of what we call “church”. This morning as I began reflecting on this topic I was reminded that Marc van der Woude (“Joel News” out of the Netherlands) once had a blog with a theme to the effect that, *“The Kingdom of God is bordered only by uncertainty”*. That alone explains why so many American Christians work so hard at avoiding the very Kingdom of which they claim to be a part. It is a “messy” place populated by “spectacles” and driven by uncontrollable “ripples”.

I’ve written before on the topic of what it means to be a “spectacle” (see our newsletter for 12-02-08 posted on our website. <http://www.safehousesofhopeandprayer.org>). It isn’t something new to us, or to the Church. Indeed, it is a recurring theme in the life of God’s people. But it is one that the contemporary Church works hard to avoid. The American Church hates messes. We prefer to have our carpets spotless, our websites slick, our music professionally orchestrated, our people dry cleaned and pressed. We don’t like messy people, messy marriages, messy finances or anything else that would put wrinkles in our well pressed cloth of “Church”. The Kingdom of God may be bordered by uncertainty - even messiness - but keep it out of the Church. Please! If Jesus and His disciples want to act like “radicals”, let Him and them do it outside the Church on their own time (which explains how Jesus ended up on the outside of His own Church in Revelation 3:20).

And then, when we least expect it, when the Church seems to be carefully dry cleaned and “at peace” (at least with itself) God raises up a “spectacle” to disrupt everything. How rude of Him. The Apostle Paul talks about these “spectacles” in 1 Corinthians 4, applying the term to himself and his apostolic calling (a description which I believe is applicable to ALL of the 5-fold leadership gifts). Here’s what Paul says, *“For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.”* Wolfgang Simson once remarked that he believed this passage was a description of the “meridian gladiators” (*meridiani gladiatorii*) of the Roman arena. The various gladiators of the Roman arena were broken into groups or classes. The gladiators fighting wild beasts appeared in the morning. The meridian gladiators were the “afternoon entertainment,” intended to wake up the after-lunch crowd. They were inexperienced, lightly armed, and no match for their opponents. According to some descriptions, their “fights” resembled executions more than gladiatorial competitions. They were “spectacles” before the crowd.

Welcome to the Kingdom of God - a place bordered by uncertainty, populated with “spectacles” and driven by “ripples”. I have come to notice a pattern in God’s dealings when it comes to spectacles. Spectacles are like bricks which God drops into the still pond of the Church. The effect is more than simply creating a disturbance. The effect is to create “ripples” which spread out through the surrounding community, demanding a response from everyone they touch, and initiating a response from God Himself. Spectacles in the Church create ripples in the Church. Those ripples force everyone in the surrounding biblical community to respond to what God is doing in their midst. How people respond produces at least two effects. First, their response reveals the health of the spiritual community of which they are a part. Are we a biblical community that manifests the 30 (plus) “one anothers” of the New Testament, or are we a community that just wants to “fix” people so they can look normal like the rest of us and we can all move on with our undisturbed vision of “pressed and dry cleaned church”.

The ripples of a spectacle have a second effect on the believing community of the Church. They cause God Himself to

respond to us, based upon our responses to the spectacle in our midst. Our responses to God's spectacles in our midst reveal who we are beneath the surface - our character. God's ripples in our lives challenge our character and reveal both the presence and absence of Christ-likeness. That God responds to our responses can be seen in the book of Jonah. Although God had decreed the destruction of Nineveh ("Forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed"), the response of the people of Nineveh to Jonah's preaching averted God's judgment for 100 years. God responds to our responses. Without laying down another "rule", there is a certain reciprocity to God's dealings with us. He responds to our responses to the spectacles He places in our midst. As a result, He challenges us to grow, refines our character and builds a community that better reflects the values of the Kingdom of God.

But "pressed and dry cleaned Christians" who fear the borders of uncertainty surrounding the Kingdom of God can be a tough audience for the spectacles God sends into their midst. Many in the audience wish such spectacles would simply go away. Their presence rattles the tightly and cleanly crafted paradigm of Church they cling to and strikes a personal chord of fear that this God-without-boundaries might one day call them to become a spectacle, too. And that's enough to make good contemporary Christians spill their lattes in their lap. Very uncomfortable (and creating a "spectacle" of a different sort!).

Biblical faith is a radical faith. And those who lay claim to it become "radicals" themselves. Radical no longer describes such people. It defines them. And people walking in radical faith will eventually become spectacles. That's the way it works. Welcome to "the Green Room" of the Church where biblical spectacles await their call to the arena.