

6-19-22 St. Peter Lutheran Church, Doss, TX      “A Letter from Bo”

*For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them.* -Matthew 18:20 Bo Cox became a Christian while in prison after a murder conviction put him there. Jesus would likely be visiting in a place like that Oklahoma prison. He said to us in Matthew 25: *I was in prison and you visited me...as you have done unto the least of these my children, you have done so to me.* I share Bo’s letter with his permission as a gift for Father’s Day.

I called my Dad this morning. He’s retired now, and it’s possible for us to have early morning conversations. It’s the next best thing to drinking a cup of coffee with my father. It’s fresh, a chance for us to be who we really are before we are heated and hammered on the forges of everyday life. This morning at about seven-thirty a really wonderful thing happened.

Dad had spent the previous week in Colorado, up in the mountains, horseback riding. He and a few of his friends had loaded the horses, hitched the trailers and made the trek. He’d been talking about it for months. Last year was his first year to go, and I can remember his tone of voice when he returned. Something special was up in those mountains, and he’d found it. For a year now he’d been telling me that when I got out he and I were going. Earlier in the year when a court case that directly affected my sentence had been overturned, we thought there was a possibility that I might even be out in time to make this year’s trip. Obviously, it didn’t happen, and Dad had spent the last few months assuring me that it was still in our destiny.

I believed that. I don’t really know on what level, but I knew that, yes, someday I’d be in the mountains with him. I had my own belief in the holy beauty of creation in it’s raw, unblemished splendor and, coupled with Dad’s tales of last year’s trip, I knew it’d be a spiritual experience, but I had no idea how absolutely miraculous that realization would turn out to be.

“Well, Colorado man, how’d it go?” I asked when he picked up the phone. “Oh, son, it was unbelievably special.” He began telling me who had made the ride with him. They were all people from my hometown, people I’d known since childhood. But, as had become custom over the last few years, he’d have to remind me how I knew these used to-be-familiar names. Who had been married to whom and where they lived, whose son was whose and how he was six foot tall, when the boy I remembered was still in grade school. It always makes me sad when I realize how much I’ve forgotten about the world where I used to live.

“As we drove up, we went through a herd of elk. Must’ve been two, three hundred.” I was looking through one of the large windows that encompass our dayroom, out at other prisoners starting their week. Men were going to work, coming back from breakfast, sitting around drinking coffee, rolling and smoking cigarettes on our small unit yard. Just another Monday morning in prison.

I wasn’t conscious when it happened, but suddenly I was seeing a herd of elk. They were leisurely strolling through a huge valley in the middle of magnificent mountains. Above them, in the clear blue sky, soared an eagle; however, it seemed like the very instant I became aware of it,

the elk turned back into blue-shirted men, the eagle was a starling, and I was back on the phone with Dad.

He was describing the third or fourth morning. A couple of the men his age had gone off to fish, and he was sitting around with a couple of the young men I remember as little league players. “By the way, son, Mark said to tell you that he thinks about you a lot.”

It touched me that this kid even remembered me, much less wondered how I was doing. Again, for a brief flash, I was sitting at the campfire with them. I had a tin coffee cup, full of steaming strong, black coffee that I could smell along with the smoke from the neatly-burning fire and, again, I didn’t notice the plastic phone in my hand or the hum of the exhaust fans as they pulled the cigarette smoke and smell of caged men out through the ceiling. Dad’s voice pulled me back.

“Anyway, I want to tell you something. I started a prayer, actually it’s a chant, for you while I was up there. I walked out in the woods, and it came to me I’d been going out daily by myself and talking to the Creator. We had some good talks. As a matter of fact, we’re not through. I’m going back this weekend. The point is, the fellas were used to me walking off into the woods and knew what I was doing. So, like I said, we were sitting around the fire and I told Mark I had to go do my thing and he said, ‘Go take care of it.’”

Dad’s voice was getting strained. Love or pain were near the surface. “I was out there on a ridge, and God and I were talking, and I began your chant,” he continued. I was wondering what it was, this chant he was speaking of. He continued: “Set him free.”

He described the scene, the trees, the wind, but I wasn’t listening. There was a huge lump in my throat. Even if I’d wanted to, I couldn’t have spoken. I could feel the wind on that Colorado mountain blowing through my body. I could smell the pines and for the tiniest, and yet most eternal, moment I was in that prayer. I could see my dad standing in the morning sun, lifting his grizzled gray beard and blue eyes into the wind, lifting up all that he had, including his son, to our Creator.

For just an instant I could feel the pain my father has having with his son being in prison and not being able to do one thing to get him out. I didn’t feel guilty or sorry for Dad. I just felt. I struggled to find my voice, to stop the overwhelming flow of every feeling I’d ever had coursing through me. I had to tell this man, this father of mine, how much I loved him. “Dad,” I blurted out, “I love you.”

“Oh, Bo, I love you, too.” Through tears he managed to say he believed everything was going to be all right. “I know, Dad, I know.” As I hung up the phone, I realized I’d forgotten to tell him something: his prayer has been answered.

Your Friend in Christ, the ultimate Liberator,  
Bo Cox