

HIDDEN IN THE HOLLOW OF HIS HAND

Deuteronomy 33:1-3 and 25b-27a – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Some of you may be aware that business as usual stopped for me this past Wednesday morning when Winston Fields from Big Creek, Kentucky called me to tell me his Daddy died, July 30th, 2013. By a miracle of God, He provided me a flight out that day at 3: 07 PM from Rock Springs to Denver to Knoxville, Tennessee. I arrived in Knoxville at 11PM Eastern Standard Time and drove on north to the Blue Ridge Mountains in Kentucky and slipped under the covers at Winston's home without waking anyone up at a quarter to three in the morning. Thursday, I prepared the eulogy and funeral message as God honored me with the second half of a huge blessing. I got to preach the funeral for Mildred Fields on January 2, 2010, and on August 2, 2013, this past Friday, I was given the honor of preaching Troy Fields memorial message. Troy was a humble man of God, born in Avawam, Kentucky, the closest post office address to Big Creek at the mouth of the hollow. He was born June 5th, 1916, going Home to Jesus at 97 years old. Troy and Mildred taught me in the first five years of elementary school in a one room school house they used a wooden divider to separate into the little room, grades 1-3 and grades 4-8, the Big Room. Troy and Mildred were huge heroes in my life, amazingly significant mentors to me in my earliest years. Many of you prayed for me in this past week in this whirlwind trip to the Kentucky hills. Thank you so much!

A few years ago, when I went on mandatory social security, they wanted me to bring them a copy of my birth certificate. I always used to say, "I was born two miles up the hollow on middle Big Creek." My birth certificate states I was born in Avawam, Kentucky, just as Troy Fields, only 28 years and ten months after Troy was born there. Troy shaped my life as a mentor and hero more than he will ever know. Troy and Mildred taught us in those early years everything we needed to know about life with godly values. My connection to Troy and Mildred, Winston, Joyce and Carolyn runs too deep for words. The way I feel about God's goodness in giving me Troy and Mildred, my two godly public school teachers, is like the words of the country Gospel song, "I'm Drinking From A Saucer Cause My Cup Has Overflowed." Troy and Mildred are back together, and they are with Carolyn, their youngest daughter, who died from cancer less than a year after Mildred, her mother died. As this funeral this week has captured my attention fully, and opened the floodgates of my eyes, I want to use the inspiration of thinking of my early mentor, Troy Baker Fields to send me to the Word of God today to preach this message before the Lord's Supper on the last words of Moses before He died.

I sense the urging of the Holy Spirit to preach this message that was Moses' final blessing on the people of Israel before his death. The words of my text are Deuteronomy 33: 1-3, 25-27 which state, "This is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the people of Israel before his death. He said, "The LORD came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; He shone forth from Mount Paran; He came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at His right hand. Yes, He loved his people, all His holy ones were in His hand; so they followed in your steps, receiving direction from you...and as your days, so shall your strength be. "There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help, through the skies in His majesty. The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms." These words of Moses were addressed to the tribe of Asher, but the Holy Spirit has made it clear to me that these words are apropos to us all today before we share communion. In these few words I find four challenges from the words of Moses as well as from my mentor, Troy Fields. These four challenges of Moses we all need, as God would desire us all to be mentors in the lives of others by our life and example and teaching, just as Troy was to me. What are these four challenges? First of all,

LIVE YOUR LIFE, HUMBLY, LOVING OTHERS AS GOD LOVES HIS HOLY ONES IN HIS HAND AND PASS ON GOD'S DIRECTIONS TO THEM. (I.) I read here in Deuteronomy 33: 3 about God, "Yes, He loved His

people and all His holy ones were in His hand, so/so that they followed in your steps..." I have no idea how much Troy Fields knew about his effectiveness in loving others, his wife, Mildred, his children, Winston, Joyce, and Carolyn, and the rest of us elementary school children who figuratively, were in his hand, as he led us, following the Lord. Moses, before he died gave his last words to the sons of Israel. The final passage in verses 25-27 was given to the tribe of Asher. Moses was a humble man. We read in Numbers 12: 3, "Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all the people who were on the face of the earth. His task was monumental—for the 3 million or so Israelites on the Exodus were receiving directions from Moses. Just like Troy was a wonderful model for me as a young boy, Moses was an awesome model—a man of God. I believe that those who are meek and humble live a beautiful life, magnifying the Lord. One of Troy Fields favorite songs was "A Beautiful Life." Those words of that old Gospel song fit him and they well illustrate Moses. "Each day I'll do a golden deed, By helping those who are in need, My life on earth is but a span, And so I'll do the best I can. I'll help someone in time of need, And journey on with rapid speed. I'll help the poor, the sick and weak, And words of kindness to them speak. To be a child of God each day, My light must shine along the way. I'll sing His praise while ages roll, And strive to help some troubled soul. While going down life's weary road, I'll try

to lift some traveler's load, I'll try to turn the night to day, Make flowers bloom along the way. The only life that will endure, Is one that's kind , and good and pure. And so for God, I'll take a stand, Each day I'll lend a helping hand. And the chorus, Life's evening sun is sinking low, A few more days, and I must go, to meet the deeds that I have done; Where there will be no setting sun.” Troy used to take us children home from school on rainy days, on snowy days, on muddy days, and more times than not, he turned around at our house, just past George Campbell's store. Nobody paid Troy to take us home from school on bad days for walking. He was just living out his humble love and Christian witness. Beloved, I challenge you. Who is taking your directions? What are you modeling for them day after day? Secondly,

MAKE SURE THOSE FOLLOWING IN YOUR FOOTSTEPS AND RECEIVING DIRECTIONS FROM YOU, BELIEVE THAT THERE IS NO GOD LIKE OUR GOD. (II.)

What picture of God are we giving as a Moses to our tribe of Asher in the home or in church or on the job? Notice verse 26. “There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help, through the skies in His majesty.” As fathers, men, we are modeling God to our children. We call God Father. What kind of earthly models are we? Troy Fields knew the Lord and Troy knew there was no God like his God. Dads, if we are harsh, we pass on an image of God that is unhealthy. If we are absent, that is a worse model. If we are lax in our character or refuse to hold others accountable as Eli did, what picture does that give others of God? Troy was a quiet believer, but when he spoke of Jesus, he was proud of the Lord. He was never harsh or proud or uppity, above any of us as his grade school children. I loved to go to his home. In a way that is hard to describe, Troy seemed to make God reachable for me and others, ever since the time I was a little boy. He just lived faithfully for Jesus in his walk and his talk. His modeling of godliness made knowing and loving Jesus reachable, accessible and desirable for me. Jesus declared in Matthew 18: 3, 4, “Truly, I say to you, “Unless you turn/repent and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” That makes Troy one of the greatest saints, because he was a humble man, down to earth, and not a phony. In the upside down kingdom of God, down is up and up is down. Those who want to ascend higher must descend lower. Troy's life reminds me of words I once read by F. B. Meyer. He said, “I used to think that God's gifts were on shelves one above the other, and that the taller we grew in Christian character, the easier we should reach them. I find now that God's gifts are on shelves one beneath the other, and that it is not a question of growing taller but of stooping lower, and that we have to go down, always down, to get His best gifts.” I've been reading Troy's magnum opus, a huge book on the history of the

Fields family in Perry County called, "Trails and Tales Of My People." One of his stories is about a huge Black Iron Kettle that now sits up at Winston's home, passed down through many generations. Troy's mother used it for canning vegetables and meat. The capacity of the kettle was 15 quarts of Mason jars. Many quarts of beans, apples, sweet potatoes, and meats were canned, and many bushels of beets were prepared for canning in that big black iron kettle, summer after summer. With the passing of time, tiny holes appeared in the walls of the kettle and some folk said there were too many minerals in the water that caused it. Troy's Mom, Cora rolled up strips of cloth and stuffed them in those holes. And if the leaks continued, she sprinkled a small amount of corn meal into the boiling water. The meal found its way to the holes and the smaller leaks were usually stopped. Troy ended that chapter saying, "This is a simple story about a common vessel, about common people delighted in performing any task that was theirs to do. Perhaps, Troy said, perhaps that was what our Lord had in mind when He admonished His followers to be fit vessels. May the Saga continue! The third challenge I give you...

LIVE YOUR LIFE GETTING CLOSE TO GOD AND MAKE OTHERS WANT A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM TOO. (III.)

Moses told the blessed sons of Asher in his last words, in Deuteronomy 33: 27, "The eternal God is your dwelling place and underneath are the everlasting arms." I wish you all could have known Troy. Pastor Larry visited Troy with me and we stayed in the home of Troy and Mildred and Mildred cooked for us. Pastor Larry loved him. If Troy could be here to speak today, I know he would urge you to trust Jesus personally, and find the Lord Jesus Christ to be your dwelling place, where you can find your resting place, hidden in the hollow of His hand. Troy's son, Winston told me of some of Troy's last words. Since Troy suffered from dementia, He struggled hard at trying to get out the words he wanted to say.

The last day before he died, the nurses knew he was dying and they came and told him goodbye. He tried to tell those nurses who were telling him good-bye, he fought for words to tell them he was going Home to be with Jesus. He couldn't seem to get out his words. He was 97 years old. Finally he said, "I'm going, I'm going, I'm going and that was all he could say. The nurses asked Troy, "Where are you going?" He said, "I'm going...to retire." That's was the word that came to the mind of one of our servicemen in World War II who served us as a military policeman. That was the word of an educator , my one room school teacher who retired from teaching in 1975. Well, what is Troy's retirement program? Listen again to Moses' words. "The eternal God is your dwelling place and underneath are the everlasting arms." Beloved, if you want to have Troy's retirement package

eternally, you must repent, believe and receive Jesus as your Savior. How do you get up close and personal with Jesus? Fearlessly, yet respectfully go up to the Lord and speak to Him and seek His face. Seek Him in repentance. Seek Him in faith. Seek to know Him intimately, up close and personal. One of my strong memories of Troy was when Pastor Larry and I visited him together about 15 years ago. Troy stood on his front porch there at the mouth of Big Creek. He had a deep love for hummingbirds and his porch was filled with hummingbird feeders out front. Troy would stand up as the hummingbirds were zooming in and out and fighting each other for a drink of his nectar. Then slowly, through practice, Troy learned the joy of getting up close and personal with his hummingbirds. I have never seen anyone else get away with what he did. He literally was standing watching the hummingbirds within a couple inches of them drinking. They not only tolerated it. They kept coming to that feeder as if they wanted to see Troy face to face. When I think of getting close to God, Troy's getting close with those hummingbirds, will always stand out to me. Getting close to God takes time and practice, but the Lord Jesus is the one who is coming up close to us, calling us as He called Troy, and He is calling your name, saying in Matthew 11: 28, "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." I hear in Jesus' words an echo of Deuteronomy 33: 27, "The eternal God is your dwelling place and underneath are the everlasting arms." Fourthly and lastly, I have a final challenge for you:

LIVE A FULL LIFE WITH A DEEP ASSURANCE OF GOD'S STRENGTH KNOWING THAT AS YOUR DAYS, SO SHALL YOUR STRENGTH BE.

(IV.) Moses said these words to the blessed sons of Asher, but Troy would want them for you, and so do I. Moses said, "And as your days, so shall your strength be." It seems sad that every day must end in night, that every birth must one day, for Troy, after 97 years, every birth must end in death, if the Lord does not come yet to rapture His church. It seems sad that summer must be followed by winter, but in the rhythm of life on earth, God has a purpose, a holy purpose even in our death. I wouldn't be preaching to you today unless God's word was true, in Psalm 116: 15, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death or the Home-going of His godly ones." Wednesday was a precious day in Heaven for not just Mildred, Troy and Carolyn. It was precious to God. Troy is part of God's Bride of Christ—and calling His Bride Home is no small thing to God. Without winter, we will never be able to enter into the treasures of the snow. Without night, we would never see the beauty of the moon and stars. Without death, we would never know the hope of graduation to Glory, absent from the body, present with the Lord. Without weakness, as Troy knew so well at the end of his life, we would never learn the fullness of God's strength being made perfect in our weakness. Before I close this memorial message and eulogy, let me share a few aspects of what it means, "as

your days, so shall your strength be.” **Only a weak person can appreciate this promise of God.** (1) Troy knew this strength God often made perfect in his weakness. Are you weak enough to know the truth of this promise? **Only the suffering person knows fully the measure of this promise.** (2) The preacher Charles Spurgeon once said, “Women suffer, and suffer well; but I do think there are very few men who could bear the tithes of the suffering that many women endure, without exhibiting a hundred times as much impatience.” If you are suffering today, enter in to this promise to the sons of Asher. **Only the tempted man or woman knows the fullness of this promise.** (3) I sang at Troy’s graveside, where my little brother Phillip is buried. “Troy, your last few years were troubled, Only you could know the pain. You weren’t afraid to face the devil, You were no stranger to the rain. So go rest high on that mountain. Troy, your work on earth is done. Go to heaven a shoutin’ Love for the Father and the Son. **Only the person desiring to live a holy life can know the fullness of God’s promise.** (4) Troy wanted to live a holy life. So did Paul, but he struggled. Read Romans 7. Many of us like both Troy and the apostle Paul have learned that when we have tried the hardest to have more faith, and to be more faithful to God, we have felt ourselves slipping backwards instead of going forward. A person who longs to be holy can cling to this verse for each of us must often admit an Achilles heel.

Only the person who feels insecure can appreciate this promise. (5) In our troubled financial times, every word of this promise is true—As your days, so shall your strength be. as your days...**Only the one who knows how to give God full reign of his expectations can know this promise.** (6) God doesn't say, “As your desires, but as your days...” The unlimited resources of God do have this limit--”As your days...” **Only those with huge days, can know the extensiveness of this promise.** (7) Job knew the loss of all he had, his wealth, his 7 sons and three daughters, his health, and the respect of his wife. Yet, he learned God's promise—saying in Job 1: 21, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” “as your days...” **Only the ones who live in variable circumstances, know the meaning of the promise.** (8) Sunny days, it is true, stormy days it is true. **Only the real elderly learn the fullness of this promise.** Troy lived long enough to say--”as your days...” **Only those who give up doubting and start trusting the Lord can know the truth of this promise.** (10) Perhaps some of you are fighting the call of God. You have doubted His Word. Perhaps some of you God is calling to Himself. Oh, receive the Lord. He will save you today. Then you'll learn for yourself—As your days, so...” – Hidden in the hollow of His hand. Amen.