

June 26, 2021

Letter from Senior Coordinator, Jeff Looker, to the Az Branch of COTL

Brothers and Sisters:

I hope everyone is having a wonderful summer!

Usually, summer slows down a bit for the community, but this June, “post-pandemic”, it seems like we have been very busy! We had our June General Leaders Gathering (GLG) on June 5th here in Tempe with over thirty leaders and guests from formation district, our Albuquerque outpost and all our California Branches in attendance. We came into the weekend with an open agenda, ready to hear from the Lord about what His plans are for us going forward as a community. Afterward, I asked the attendees what their takeaways from the weekend were, and it was a surprising variety of answers. It seemed the Holy Spirit revealed a different piece of a bigger picture to each attendee, so that all together it formed a complete picture. It’s amazing how much God loves reminding us how we are a “Body” made up of many members and we are not complete without each other! (1 COR 12:12)

My takeaways from the GLG were threefold. First, Pam Flynn had a revelation from Luke 5 about Jesus telling Peter to cast his nets on the “other side” of the boat, although Peter had been toiling all night and came up empty.

And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken; (Luke 5:4-9, RSV-CE)

I see this scripture as a sort of parable of our life in COTL at this moment in time. There has been much “toil” based on our experience and recent history that has seemingly borne little fruit (at least in our limited ways of measuring!). Although Peter was tired and discouraged, Jesus asked Peter to use the same nets, the same boat, the same lake containing the same fish, but at His command to lower them in a new way- to the “other side” and the results were fruitful this time. There was no difference between one side of the boat and the other- The same lake and fish were under the boat! The difference was in the timing of the word of command of Jesus and his obedience to that.

What I think this means for us is that we can’t wait for the “right people”, or “timing” or the perfect “program” to bear fruit. Being faithful to our way of life and faithful to our call to City of the Lord will bear fruit when the Lord desires it so long as we are obedient to our call. SO the question I suppose each of us has to ask ourselves is “ how obedient am I to the Lord’s call on my life to covenant community?” Sure, acedia, disappointment, relationship problems, sin,

unhealed wounds and a variety of things affect our desire. This isn't unique to our community by any means. The enemy loves to beat down the body of Christ in a variety of ways. Jenelle Van Brunt reminded us that we all need to "fall in love again" with our first love (the Lord) and have a fresh encounter. That would be a "nets on the other side of the boat" event for sure. Lord we need your grace and more of you in our lives!- Amen?

As I was pondering the "nets on the other side of the boat" scripture, I was reminded of a phone message that was left on our community voicemail about 3 1/2 years ago from a brother named Anthony Schmelzer from Ohio. He had never heard of City of the Lord and he received a prophetic revelation about "Tempe, AZ", went online to look us up, and found our website and phone number, and called us. His message was this:

"I was praying the other day with one of my friends and praying for laborers to rise up when the Lord put Tempe, Arizona on our hearts. Later that night I got led to your organization by the Lord. I wanted to say a word that the Lord has greatness for you; that there are laborers rising up through the ministry that the Lord is doing through you and that there is going to be great revival coming out of Tempe. So, we come into agreement with what He is doing there. I bless you in the name of Jesus, ask Mother Mary to hold you tight in her mantle as great things come up with the City of the Lord and with its members."

Anthony is part of a missionary team from the Damascus Campus in Ohio. They currently have 34 missionaries and in the last 16 months have reached over 10,000 junior high and high school students with an encounter with Jesus. Their top leaders originated out of SPO in Columbus, Ohio. [<https://damascuscampus.com/>] Wow. I claim that word in Jesus name! Brothers and sisters, the Lord is not done with us yet! We have not seen all the wonders and works of the Lord!

My second takeaway from the GLG: Mike Bergez' had a revelation about travelling lightly (per the prophecy from 2014) and focusing on the four "irreducible elements" of our community life. 1. Love of God, 2. Love of one another, 3. Our Covenant and 4. Our Charism (which informs our mission). There was a renewed desire expressed by many at the GLG to focus on relationship building and being a witness to the world of covenant love, radical hospitality and culture and that it is possible to live successfully in Christian community and thrive! This witness is evangelical, although many could see it as inward looking. I believe that living our call well has a dual purpose and is a "both/ and" experience of giving life to those inside community and witnessing to those outside.

My third takeaway from the GLG: Cardinal Cantalamessa's Pentecost exhortation this year to be emptied so that we can be filled, to become childlike, not "professionals" in the Spirit. This is hard to do without thinking we are burying our "talents" so to speak. We want to produce good fruit and be hard at work before the Master's return. But I think this is more of an interior disposition to be more of a listener and encourager to one another rather than a "corrector" and teacher. We need to have lighter hearts with one another and have more confidence in

God and less in our own merits and strengths and need to be right. Great gifts require great humility. In short, simplifying our life to the essentials, living the Romans 12 life of honoring and serving one another in affection and humility and lay aside our anxieties about the future of COTL. At the word of the Lord we will have the harvest we desire, using what he has given us. After all, our efforts will bear nothing if the word of the Lord is not spoken over those works. I also received this scripture during the GLG that reminds us:

Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep. (Psalms 127:1-2, RSV-CE)

To close I want to thank all those that work so hard on our summer Lord's Day gatherings and special events! Our three provisional coordinators Steve Beguhl, Dcn. Dave Knebelberger and Tom Pivonka for leading and spearheading these Summer Potluck Lord's Day events. Thanks to Lori Moriarty for all she does to keep things on track, and for all of our members that pitch in for decorations, setup, cleanup, music, etc etc etc! Also special thanks to Lynn Lillis and her inner healing team for putting together and organizing the Eric Genuis event tonight at COTL. SO much work went into this event and we will have over 90 in attendance- many guests who are first timers to COTL that will benefit from the witness and outpouring of love and service of our members.

We truly are one body with many parts as the reading from Corinthians says so well. Thanks brothers and sisters for your "yes" to building Covenant Community as a witness to the world of God's love.

Blessings,

Jeff Looker