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**The Nosedive**

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(1 Chron 28:20-21; 1 Cor 2:1-12; Luke 9:51-62)

Once upon a time, someone told me that, if an airplane is going straight down in a nosedive, the only way the plane can pull out of it's dive is to increase its acceleration. In other words, it must be made to go down faster, until the wind dynamics kick in that make it possible for the plane to swing back upward. It sounds counterintuitive, crazy even... speeding more quickly toward death in order to live!

This is an interesting idea to apply to a lot of different situations. And when you do, it seems that there is something to it. You can apply it to running of a business or an institution like a church, with a limited budget. While the less stressful thing to do would be to tighten the budget and slow the impending end, sometimes the best way to avoid that end is to put faith in the vision of what we are doing and accelerate spending.

It seems counterintuitive to spend more when everything in us is telling us to pull back, even though we know that in pulling

back, our engines will stall. But, if our vision is truly in line with God's will, and we lean into it, may it not be that the updraft of God's grace (so to speak) will kick in and make it possible for us to pull out of our nosedive?

### **Gospel as Nose dive**

I think that there is a kind of "nose dive" quality to the Gospel as it is proclaimed to us through Jesus's journey to the cross. When Jesus first shares with Peter and the disciples that he is going to Jerusalem to be crucified, Peter pulls him aside and tries hard to dissuade him. And Jesus responds, "Get thee behind me, Satan."

Peter represents a fear response to Jesus's plan which is completely understandable. If Jesus's Good News is about life, then, by setting himself on a course straight for Jerusalem, is he not basically taking a nose dive straight into a situation that will almost certainly bring about his own death?

And the answer is that Peter is thinking in terms of a worldly physics, in which a nose dive toward death must end in death. But Jesus is trusting in a divine physics, in which his nose dive toward death is actually the only path to the resurrected life.

His airplane is God's love and as crazy as it seems, he puts total trust in the course God's love is setting for him, even though it appears to point toward certain death. And so, he leans harder on the throttle.

### **Christian view of life as nose dive**

I think the Christian view of life is paradoxical. It does require the courage to draw nearer to death for the sake of life. That can sound morbid or even crazy. But I think a better word for it, if it is done in the right spirit, is "beautiful."

Young adults die to their earlier freedoms as single people when they take the "nose-dive" into marriage and have children. All their bachelor friends stand by screaming. "No! It's a death sentence! But with out the sacrificial death of the bachelor's life, the deeper more hidden beauty in raising a family would never happen.

And then when the children are grown, they have to be set free to go their independent ways and so comes for many an even harder death.

The same is true for a career or any rewarding phase of life. We must be able to accept endings graciously and in order to recognize and receive the life that is offered to us in the phase that lies ahead. And then be ready to die again, by letting go of what we have received in order to receive yet again, until we die the final death that leads to eternal life.

I think that when a child goes off to college or a parent dies or something happens that signals the end of a cherished phase in the life of a family, that there is a natural tendency to want to drag our feet. We don't want it to end. And so, in many homes, a teenager's room will be kept just as it was left, because the parent does not have the heart to put the room to new use. And so the room goes unused.

I think the idea of leaning into a nosedive applies here too. If we refuse to lean on the throttle of change at all, then we begin to live in a past that doesn't make proper use of the present. Our plane will stall and crash into the ground – perhaps more slowly, but it will still crash.

Conversely, if we go too far the other way and commit unseeingly to leaning hard on the throttle, we will crash all the

sooner. But if we lean on the throttle of change in a way that is attentive to the changing dynamics, then we can successfully meet the opportunity to ride the updraft that God will provide.

Another way to say all this is to say that we have to have the courage to die well, in order to live, trusting that in what appears to be the end of the line, God will lead us deeper into his saving love. According to our Christian faith, this is the only way to greater life and ultimately to eternal life. And I think this must also be so for churches, as they pass from one time in history into the next.

I don't think that the idea of a plane pulling out of a nosedive works only partially as a metaphor for the Christian message of death and resurrection. It is flawed in the sense that it gives us the impression that "death" can be avoided. But as we know, Jesus's plane doesn't actually come out of its nose dive. It collides with the ground in spectacular fashion and the death is complete. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me" are his last words.

And in many ways that is exactly the way we experience the most severe losses in our lives. They are very real and painful,

and we do not experience a sudden updraft of grace that carries us safely back into the air. Instead, we experience a full on collision, that leaves us dazed and broken, the other side of which, we can see no future.

But the Christian message is that there is a future, and that somehow, by the grace of God, all that is of true value that we have lost will not really have been lost at all, but will be restored to us forever in the life to come. And that message applies only to that final death, when we leave this world, but also to the spiritual deaths we experience during the course of our lives.

### **Application**

As we have our Annual Meeting today, I think it is good that we carry with us this sense that we are called to accelerate courageously into the unknown future, trusting in the unseen forces of grace to buoy us up, just as Jesus did when he set his face to go to Jerusalem. We are guided by a faith that assures us that there will be some painful deaths that we will face, in every sense of the word. But our faith is rooted in the paradoxical understanding that, without death there is no resurrection. Together we participate in the great work of

Christ; the work of dying gracefully in order to live more fully  
in God's love.