
NELSON'S NOTES

| ST. PETE FIRST |

I'm still getting over how Google Maps has monetized its product to advertise temporary business venues. I wonder how much it would cost to show your kids' street corner lemonade stands on the site. I'd never thought of Google Maps as the new Yellow Pages, but you could see how crazy it could get, eventually. I'm sticking with MapQuest.

Anyway... Thanks for listening to the rant. Last Sunday I found these two humongous tents set up around the Mahaffey, and I figured out that a Boat Show was coming to town. So this past Sunday I walked down there in the waning hours of the show, and of the day. As vendors brought down their displays, they still wanted \$20 to get in, so I skipped it, opting to walk along the stadium sidewalk.

A tall chain link fence separated me from the boats, a continuous tarp created a visual barrier that separated the haves from the have-nots. I felt like Jean Valjean as I climbed the stairs of Al Lang Stadium to scan the show from that perch. Walking towards the Mahaffey I peered through the rips in the tarp like an American Jamal Malik. The trek ended along the promenade of the Mahaffey, checking out the boatload (get it?) of ancillary vendors in the tent and the numerous boats for sale in the water.

Now, don't cry for me Argentina (WHERE did all of these theater references come from!), I'm really not a boat guy. I loved my jet ski, but my stomach doesn't like anything bigger. So I felt like a reluctant tourist, content to catch the sights, but at a distance.

I imagine that's the way a lot of people feel about Christianity. They see the attraction. They pass it in the course of their daily lives. It is mildly curious to them, and while the real or perceived barriers let them peer in on occasion, they have no intent on really participating, not knowing what joys are to be found inside.

This got me thinking about the intentional or non-intentional barriers we put up. We do most of our worship inside where nobody can see or hear. In the past we have demanded "Sunday Best" clothes to get in. We have our own language ("port" and "starboard" are nothing compared to, say, "transubstantiation"). We need to be mindful of these barriers.

But I think even those of us on the "inside" look at the life that God has for us with the disposition of a "reluctant tourist" (I know- the movie was "Accidental Tourist," but the plot line doesn't line up). We're not sure we want to get that involved. We don't want to take the time to feed the hungry, or study the book, or stand up for justice, or teach the young. That's for true boat people - I mean - truly devoted. We're OK walking the periphery.

God wants us all in. God doesn't charge \$20.00 to get in. Not that His grace is cheap (finally moved on to literature). God wants us to be truly free: free from our fears, free from our doubts, free from our prejudices, free to serve in the most fulfilling ways. This is God's desire. What side of the fence are you on?

Back in church,

Craig

"The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever," (1 John 2:17).

