**The Immovable Ladder – By Thailer Jimerson**

This year has been a year of travel for me as a mixture of opportunity, tragedy, and family has carried me to San Francisco, Tampa, Las Vegas, Cleveland, Nashville, and Mobile. But this summer I was granted the opportunity of a lifetime as opportunity flew me to the holy land of Israel. Truly, this could never have happened without the support of my church, and I thank you all for that.

We spent our time along the entire span of the country, spending one day on the Mediterranean, three days in Galilee (or Tiberias as it’s called today), one day near the Dead Sea, and three additional days in Jerusalem. As you can imagine, they saved the best of the trip for last. On a part of our trip, we were allowed to trace the steps of the Via Dolorosa, the traditional path Christ took on his last day which encompasses various scenes from the gospels – all from his trial, to the very execution itself. The last four sections of the Via Dolorosa are all housed – if you can believe it – underneath one roof: The Church of the Holy Sepulchre. According to tradition, this church was built over the section of Jerusalem where it is said that Christ was crucified, and, less than 20 meters away, where he was buried. Though I’m a little skeptical about all the stock these high church traditions place in holy monuments and the like (since such seems contrary to the spirit of Christ’s teaching in passages like John 2.18-22), I still believe that there is good reason to believe that the death of Christ occurred somewhere in that general location. We spent a good time entering the traditional burial place, touching the hill upon which he was crucified, and surveying the types of people a site like this drew.

Once we exited the main door to the church, Gus, our Israeli tour guide, pointed our attention in the direction of a window ledge overlooking the entry. On it stood what he called “the immovable ladder”. There was nothing special about the ladder. It was a simple wood frame, decaying wood rungs, leaning against the exterior of the building. Anyone would walk by it without giving a second thought. What made the ladder special, however, was its history.

See, the ladder is really old. Some estimate it hasn’t been moved in over 100 years. Instead, for over a century, it has stood there, against that window, unmoved. While many great wars have raged on, there it stood. While Israel was granted its own sovereignty again, there it stood. While millions have made their pilgrimage to the holy site, they all walked underneath the immovable ladder.

Why wasn’t it moved, you asked? Well, the church isn’t owned by a single religious denomination. Instead, it’s shared among 5 – 6 groups, depending on how you reckon it. Those groups sharing the site: Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Armenians, Coptics, and Ethiopian Orthodox. Because the site is shared among differing religious groups, nothing happens in the church without the consent of all parties involved. In other words, they all have to agree on an action – even something so small as moving a ladder. Since they’ve not all agreed on what to do with it, there it stands still.

There’s a lesson to be learned about immovable ladders. We might be tempted to scold those high church traditions that share that particular chapel, and its particular ladder, in the middle of Jerusalem – but we have our own immovable ladders in our church. Division plagues churches everywhere. And this disunity is sad, so sad when seen in light of the following passages:

* 10 I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. 11 For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. 12 What I mean is that each one of you says, “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Cephas,” or “I follow Christ.” 13 Is Christ divided? **(1 Corinthians 1.10-13)**
* 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise. **(Galatians 3.28-29)**
* 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. **(Ephesians 2.14-18)**

There is “one body,” Paul says. He took division very seriously and we should beware a spirit of inflexibility or divisiveness over “matters of opinion” (Romans 14), reckoning ourselves dead to selfish fights, not seeing the peace and unity that transcends our relative differences.

How sad that in very place we witness the immovable ladder, an absurd scene of selfishness, we also see Christ crucified. This is also the very place where existed the single greatest act of selflessness: Jesus on a cross - yet Christ came to redeem us even from this.