

“Would You Move to the World’s Most Dangerous Country?”

Luke 4:16-21

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Smoke Rise Baptist Church

Stone Mountain, Georgia

October 5, 2003

Communion Devotion

We need to pray today for our friend and neighbor, Reverend Burgess Carr. He lives in Stone Mountain and is the pastor of St. Timothy’s Episcopal Church in Decatur. He has gone to the war torn country of Liberia to help his half-brother establish a new government. This summer, Liberia’s warlord, Charles Taylor, was forced into exile through international pressure and rebel armies. Mr. Gyude Bryant was chosen to replace him to restore peace and order to what many call, ‘the world’s most dangerous country.’”

Reverend Carr has been summoned to Liberia not only because his half-brother is the new leader, but also because of his own expertise in peacemaking. In 1973, Reverend Carr was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. He has spent four decades helping to resolve conflicts around the world. He helped negotiate the end of civil wars in Sudan, Nigeria and Ethiopia. He’s lectured about conflict resolution before the United Nations and the World Bank. He has been hailed as one of the most significant African Christians in the last century.

In 1999, at the age of sixty-four, he moved with his wife, Francesca, to Atlanta to retire. He was persuaded to become the pastor at St. Timothy’s and is doing an outstanding job. How fortunate we are to have him in our community and we look forward to his return later this fall.

We must pray for his safety, though, so that he can return to Atlanta where he is also needed. For you see, he is on a high-risk mission. He has gone to a country that has been turned into a wasteland because of constant wars. At least eighty percent of the people lives below the poverty line. The average life expectancy is forty-seven. Food, water and medicine are in short supply.

One of Carr’s biggest threats is being ambushed by children turned into soldiers. Many of the children in Liberia have witnessed the raping and killing of their parents and been kidnapped by rebel armies. These children have been armed and forced to kill their fellow citizens.

Carr will also be a target for any faction wanting to remove his brother from office. Since 1980, two rulers have been assassinated and armed factions have forced others into exile. Before leaving Atlanta, Carr conceded that he is afraid of what awaits him.

So why did he go? Why would he take such risks? Why would he trade the security of St. Timothy’s for the volatility of Liberia? He feels led of God to use his expertise to make life better for his countrymen. This is what his faith has prepared and empowered him to do.

Two thousand years ago, another peacemaker left the safety and security of home to make life better for his people. Standing in the synagogue in Nazareth, he announced his arrival and intentions when he read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to

release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Sitting down he continued, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" Luke 4:18-19,21.

Jesus entered his world at a risky time, too. As far as the religious leaders were concerned, there was no room for him. He was uninvited and unwelcome. He was an intruder and if he would not leave, he would be forced out.

That's exactly what happened, wasn't it? In approximately three years he was vilified, tortured and crucified. This mission of mercy cost him his life.

So why did he come? Why would he take such a high risk? Why would Jesus trade the security of heaven for the volatility of earth? He wanted to make the world a better place. This was what his faith prepared and empowered him to do.

As we remember his great sacrifice around this table laden with reminders of his love for us, let us thank him for his compassion and courage. Let us also pray for the courage to go where we are needed to make life better for those around us. Our world needs more people with the heart and bravery of our Lord and Burgess Carr. A lot more.