

## *To my Church Family*

*August 2016*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Summer is almost over, have you vacationed anywhere? Recently, a horrifying attack happened in Nice, France which immediately reminded me to pray for all of you Brothers and Sisters who may be travelling. This world is becoming increasingly complex, where can one find peace? Where is paradise? One can't find real peace on earth, only in our Lord Jesus Christ can we find true peace, the peace no one can snatch away. Jesus promised "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." We should be grateful for Lord's peace is with His people.

This July our whole family went to Bahamas for vacation. Before leaving, I did not know where we were going, everything was arranged by our son-in-law. Annually his family has a large reunion, parents and siblings altogether a dozen or so, from different places would get together in one spot, and our daughter and son-in-law always took my wife and me along. Bahamas is famous for its sandy beaches, luxurious hotels and fancy restaurants, my wife and I enjoyed being among this large extended family, and those seven children added more fun to the occasion. However, this extravagant vacation style and attractions crowded with tourists were not most enjoyable to my wife and me and we felt a little lost the whole week. Let me share with you our most memorable vacation which was a short trip to Vermont.

I remember that trip was planned by my wife and I had no prior knowledge. That day, I came home from church and as I walked into the door, I could smell the fragrance of dinner and instantly my heart felt warm and comforted. Home is the safe harbor for all pressures of life, it doesn't matter how chaotic it might be outside of the home, how heavy the burdens one may be carrying, once arrived home, changed into comfortable clothing, kissed the wife, all worries seemed to disappear without a trace. I've long learned to be content in all things: having an opportunity to serve, good health, every family member is safe, no shortage of food, a warm home, what else can one want or need? My wife as usual was busily working in the kitchen and when she saw me, she softly asked: "Monday is a holiday, I can take Tuesday off, let's go to Vermont for two days. Would you like to go?" She had already made all the arrangements thus I simply yielded and packed.

Vermont is not far from New Jersey, just about a 3-hour drive, with beautiful scenery. It was during the Fall, New Jersey is known as the Garden State; however, the scenery north of it is even better, maple forests all along the way. Maple leaves have begun to turn red and there were full of maple trees and forests, the many beautiful colors of maple leaves were impossible to describe: light green, dark green, golden yellow, orange, bright red, etc. together formed a supernatural painting. I was reminded about a passage in Psalms 8 "O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory upon the heavens." Under the blue sky, with rolling hills, these maple leaves of many colors created a most spectacular and breathtaking painting. The lodging we stayed for the two nights was a vacation log cabin, unpretentious but well equipped, lent to us by a loving brother from church. Once inside the cabin, as we put down our bags, my wife said happily: "You see, God really loves us, we may not possess much but we get to enjoy a lot and all of the best!" From the bottom of my heart, I said "Amen."

We spent some time settling down and evening was fast approaching. My wife and I took a stroll on a trail bordering the nearby lake enjoying the magnificent sunset, and taking in the beautiful scenery created by distant homes turning on their lights and plumes of white smoke arising from roof tops. I was

reminded of a poem by poet Tao Yuanming about fading image of distant village and chimney smoke from houses nearby. Walking hand in hand with my wife taking in all these natural beauty, my heart was peaceful, many worries took a backseat, and I felt very blessed. Because it was getting late, we agreed that next morning we'll get up early to hike. Due to driving to get here, I was tired, and I felt asleep right away. Next morning when I woke up, it was sunny, birds were singing, a wonderful day for hiking. I washed up and my wife had already prepared a pot of ginkgo and scallop porridge which I devoured right away. My wife wanted to ensure I have strength for hiking, she also made toasted ham sandwiches after which I felt I was fully charged and ready to go.

My wife selected two sticks for us to use as canes then we walked toward the hill. This place actually was a ski resort during winter months and we could see the steel cables used for the ski lift so my wife and I walked along the direction of the cables. After 45 minutes, we started to pant; another 30 minutes later, our legs were shaking involuntarily. I could see the hill top was not too far away, we continued to struggle onward. Because I wanted a good angle to take a snapshot of my wife for memory sake, I gritted my teeth and walked faster in front of her. After a while, I was breathing heavily like a raging bull then I sat down, took camera out of my backpack, and adjusted the focus. As I looked through the camera's lens, I saw the love of my life with arched back, wearing a soft hat, using a stick as a cane, and struggling alone on the path. Periodically, she would look up and give me a smile – a smile too familiar to me. I suddenly realized, we've been married over 40 years now and she has always smiled at me in the same manner. It does not matter in good or adverse times, cloudy or sunny day; if I've done something wrong, or messed up, she always smiled at me. This smile encompassed love, acceptance, forgiveness, and complete self sacrifice. This affection, this love, to what do I deserve and how I can return it? As we grow older, I've learned to cherish our private time together, and to treasure this familiar smile. I also thought about the fact that there will come a day when only one of us will be left walking on the trail, whether it be my wife or myself, the loneliness will be very hard to bear. During our earlier courtship days, we innocently discussed the question who should die first. After some heated debates and few days of quiet reflection, finally she agreed to let me go first because she knew how deeply I loved her and I may not be able to endure the suffering of losing her. During that moment on the mountain trail, it seemed most scenes from our married lives surfaced in front of me and my eyes moistened.

Two days ended quickly and I thoroughly enjoyed our alone time together, it became a most memorable vacation. I thank God for giving us days together as a couple, I thank the Lord for giving me such an understanding companion for life. "Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits." No one is perfect and some days are not as good as others but as long as we're content, we can have joy. This is reality, no life is without storm, moon will not be full always, everyday we have with our family members is a gift from God. The same goes for the time we have as brothers and sisters in the same church, we need to treasure this time too. When many people are gathered, differing opinions is inevitable, we need to remember the teaching in the Bible "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household." (Ephesians 2:19)

Serving together with you in the Lord,

*Pastor Calvin Tran*