

“Service is like peeing your pants;
everyone else sees it,
but you get the warm feeling.”

Today’s theme at Church was on service. I doubt it was planned that all three meetings, from Sacrament talks, to the Sunday school lesson, and finishing with the Elder’s Quorum instruction from the District, would have the theme to service explicitly running through them; more likely it was one of the divinely inspired coincidences aimed at getting our attention.

There were several highlights from the spoken word, both lighthearted including the quote leading off this entry, or more commonly of a spiritual nature that will be shared below, but the promptings that the listener has in their heart to take action are by far the most important gift to be obtained from the talks. Just like a talk about faith is valuable only if the faith of the speaker and/or the listeners is increased, talks and lessons on charity and service are only going to be of real value if the participants leave with a resolve to take greater charitable action in some manner. The Holy Spirit is sure to provide detailed inspirations to anyone willing to open their hearts towards charity. Its funny how that works.

One of the speakers told a story that happened soon after she had arrived in China. She was at the supermarket for the first time, trying to buy the necessities of life, and utterly lost in the energetic new environment. A lady approached her, noticing that she was lost, and offered to help. It turns out this person was one of the few local Chinese members of the Church, but the important part of the story was how she was willing to take a chance on leaving her comfort zone and meet a stranger, and offer help. It is also a testament of the love of God and how he will bless us through other people.

In Sunday School, as we cover church history, a famous pioneer story was used as the focal point of the lesson. In this true story, three young men who voluntarily carried an entire handcart company across an icy river, later dying from the effects of the exposure. When President Brigham Young heard of this heroic act, he wept like a child, and later declared publicly, “That act alone will ensure [them] an everlasting salvation in the Celestial Kingdom of God.”

During this lesson, I was reminded of the hurricane season during the fall of 2004, when two very powerful hurricanes came though the part of FL I was living in. The first one was a solid category three. The second one, exactly two weeks to the hour and in the exact same place, managed to bring even more power and destruction. Although the weekend following the second storm was General Conference weekend, when we would normally gather around a television to watch the live broadcast of council from the Lord’s prophet and apostles, our

Stake President told all of the able bodied young people and men that we should be out in the community helping those in the storms aftermath. These acts during these moments of need are what “pure religion” and Christianity is about. We would be able to watch the recorded conference at a later time.

As part of the discussion in Elder’s Quorum, we were asked to make a list of reasons we pass on service opportunities. The quick list we accumulated is as follows:

Too tired
Too busy
Too much effort
Not planned
Entertainment conflict
Fear
Someone else’s responsibility
Don’t like it
Need to stay home
Work
Vanity

Sound familiar? For today, I’ll admit that I have not only thought these before, but also used many of them to bail on a chance to serve. Not something I’ll claim to be proud of, and in retrospect these moments have to be some of my worst and most short sighted. Hopefully my character hasn’t already been defined by these lapses in judgment.

The conclusion of this log is not all doom and gloom. What it is really about is the realization that I will have countless opportunities while I am in China to step up and offer charitable service to the people I meet every day. It is the realization that my time in China just might be more about what I have to offer China than what it has to offer me. I have some ideas, and this will not be the place to list them. I’d rather write about them after the fact. But I will concede that the first step will be opening my heart to a greater capacity and being willing to share my time and talents with the people around me. Sometimes this may even require physically doing something quite grand in scale. In the long run, a service opportunity will be much more pleasurable than sleeping in on a Saturday morning, and I might have to make a new friend or to make that happen. In the end there is nothing greater than showing ones love for God by keeping their covenants and His commandment to serve His children, whether they my family or friends and neighbors.