

## *7 Seconds Short*

Christ the Redeemer Church  
July 12, 2009  
Green Sunday after Pentecost/Youth Academy

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 14-16  
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He was sitting in the circle of youth this week holding a military chaplain's green field communion kit. Of all the things he could have picked out from my Story Item table, he picked this green bag with communion serving cup and plates in it. He selected it from photos, books, statues, figurines, wooden German clackers, and other unique items.

He task in this Storytelling class was to tell us all of what this item reminded him of in his life. Others had picked it out earlier in the week and told of fathers and uncles and grandfathers who had served in the military around the world and of how this green bag reminded them of the family stories.

This boy told a little different story. He told of when his dad was applying to be accepted as an officer into the army years ago and of how his dad had to run a timed race to qualify to be an army officer. The father invited his wife and this young boy to come and cheer.

The boy recalls that he and his mother were cheering his father on and clapping and yelling for him to beat the clock and to qualify for a career in the army.

His dad failed. In front of his cheering son and his hopeful wife, he failed. He fell seven seconds short of succeeding. It did not work out as planned or hoped for that day for the three of them. He was not commissioned as an army officer due to having failed the run.

Most of us would want to run that qualifying race in private and not risk the public viewing.

One Sunday morning in Arizona right before church I parachuted from an airplane one time at 12,000 feet in a tandem jump. I wanted Pam and Amity and Daniel to be on the ground to watch the jump. I wanted to land right beside them, take off the chute, and walk to church and preach a sermon entitled "Ponderings of a Plummeting Preacher."

On the way down before our parachute opened, I began to hope the chute opened and that this all would work out okay for my family on the ground! Chute opened and I am here.

Sometimes we just embarrass ourselves in life, don't we? My wife and I were sitting in the funeral parlor in San Marcos back in 2003 just after arriving from over in Europe to be the new pastor and family in town. This was my first funeral in Texas in many years.

A retired town doctor and his elderly and nicely dressed wife were standing in front of me in the parlor. I was on the couch and she was standing. While she was talking, her skirt fell to the floor, right at eye level to me. She had on underwear. I did not blink but

remained motionless and kept talking as if nothing happened. What could I say?

Eventually her husband told her that her skirt was on the floor. She pulled it back up.

Before the funeral the next day her friend told me that the doctor's wife was mad at me for not laughing or saying anything when her skirt fell down. I was told that I had better say *something funny* to her or that she would be very mad at me. Okay. Funny.

So when she arrived at the funeral I said, "So that is what y'all mean here in Texas when you say 'Come to the viewin' at the funeral home.'" I told her I did not realize that a viewing was literally a viewing in Texas. She laughed hard and we became friends.

Ken Medema was born blind and was there on the piano when this young man told of his father falling short in the race. Ken knows the story of how things are not always perfect in life. He knows better than any of us that life is a matter of dealing with challenges and dashed hopes. He listens to stories and composes songs on the spot about life. He wrote and sang about the boy being hugged by his father after falling 7 seconds short.

Later in life the failed dad told his son that the army life was a tough one and that it would have required long separations from his son and from his wife. It worked out okay. He was explaining to his son what to do in life when things do not work out the way we want and when our lives fall short of our hopes.

Ken composed a song for this young man and sang and played it on the spot. We were all in tears throughout the song. He sang of how the boy yelled for his father, the father failed, and then the father ran over and hugged his son. Success or failure is not the point.

King David failed in life. Peter failed. Jesus failed on the cross in front of his hopeful friends. The friends thought Jesus failed on the cross but He actually succeeded in showing them how to live, die, and love to the end. That love conquers death.

Ken wrote a song about the father falling seven seconds short. The song included the part about the love between the father and the son being the most important part of the story. It was not about the failure. It was about the love between them that day. In a song. Ken sees more clearly than any of us. He sees what we can not see.

I have preached for 30 years that God is writing a song about each one of us and that we just need to listen for the song and live it out. But I was shocked when Ken was actually able to do it in front of me. I had been preaching something that I was shocked when it really happened! There really *is* a song being written for each of our lives. It is God's song. For us. It is song that reminds us that our failures and disappointments in life will be turned into a song of beauty and purpose. If we just listen closely we can hear the song. This is why David played such loud music that day. God is writing a song for you and for me. With perfect music and instrumental accompaniment.

That boy is loved by his father. So are we. Keep your skirts and pants up this week. And run the race set before you. You give God something to sing about today. Amen.