
“Marshmallow”

Deuteronomy 4:29-31

“No matter what, seek God, and you will not be abandoned.”

I don't have anything against smaller animals like cats and dogs. Critters like skunks and raccoons and armadillos and snakes you can have. But dogs and cats are mostly okay, even though I'd rather not own one personally.

My preference is working with larger animals, specifically the horses and cattle on a ranch. I know no domesticated, trained, or herd animal is perfect. But I also know how much dynamite can be packaged in a dog no bigger than a large cantaloupe.

Take Drover for example. He was a small white mutt, the sidekick to a larger golden mutt named Sadie, and by far the lesser in courage on the LZ ranch, at least in my view. Drover was mostly a follower and shied out of the way of cattle long before they could have been any danger to him. I guess that's part of the reason I took to calling him Marshmallow: all white, a bit fluffy, and pretty much full of hot air as good cow dogs go.

But he sure stirred up a pasture-load of trouble the day Tom and I tried to bring in cattle in “the home place” for feeding. It was mid-Spring, and we weren’t sure we could do it, but we decided to try and call the pasture of newly bought steers in with the pickup horn they’d been called with to their feed all Winter.

We were pleasantly surprised when it seemed to be working. The steers, all 80 of them, were a bit timid because we wanted to call them into the front lot, which would save us the trouble of rounding them up later. They were headed that way. The pickup was into the lot, and about half the herd was through the gate.

Suddenly there came a sickly “yip” from under the bottom board of an adjoining corral. It was Drover, Marshmallow, trying to act tough from behind protective cover. All cowboy hell broke loose!

Before we could do anything halfway constructive, the steers spooked and split down the middle. Half of the now crazy critters blew north, took out two fences around the hay lot, and didn’t stop running for a full mile. The other half seemed to scamper backward for fifty yards before turning and disappearing to the far back side of the home pasture.

Then it was all over but the screaming. Tom was so mad his red face could have lit up a midnight moonless sky like a bonfire, and Marshmallow disappeared down the creek, not to be seen for close to three days. For a stupid move and sad little yip, being gone for that long was pretty smart. Drover allowed time for things to cool down a bit before he, tail between the legs, came whimpering back to the house looking for some sympathy and supper.

That afternoon was spent hunting down and gathering

42 steers in the home pasture. The next day we started the search for the other 38 head. All told, we repaired three fences, doctored four calf-hide barbed wire wounds, and lost a whole day out of the week's work plan.

But that was it. Everything was fixable and forgivable, and the groaning gave way to laughter. The day was not destroyed! Lost hours were adjusted into next week, and life rolled back into routine until the next ranch rodeo.

Life's crazy like that, though. When everything seems smooth as silk, such peaceable reverie can be blown to bits with sudden impact. The news of someone you love graduating from this journey across the stage to our Heavenly home, a fall that breaks an arm, a dead battery in the pickup when you're already late, all these and many other surprises can catch you off guard.

And yet, perhaps in those moments especially, our Father God is intimately present to us, ready to offer relief and reassurance, grace and gentleness, as well as the steady reminder that we're never alone.

In moments like that, when we may feel abandoned or helpless or confused or angry, we are offered the blessed assurance that this is not all there is to it, and the sweet invitation to consider how a blasted but now humorous experience with a Marshmallow mutt might become a cherished story about the glory of God in the midst of surprise!

“Marshmallow”

DEUTERONOMY 4:29-31

One of the most cherished promises of the Lord is found here. It's a promise, an assurance, that no matter how deep the mud might be we're stuck in, no matter how hot the heat

that tries to roast us, no matter how forsaken we may at times feel, if, IF we choose to seek the face of our Lord with all our heart, with everything in us that can conceive of and pursue him, *we will find him!*

Not only that, we can cling to that divine promise because this, our Creator God, is merciful, is in total unabashed love with us, and he *will not* abandon us, leave us to our own resources, let us fall farther than he can reach out to catch us . . . IF we seek him with all our heart!

REFLECTION

When was the last time you had done everything you thought you had been asked to do, everything you needed to do to complete your task/work with integrity and satisfaction, only to have it all blown away at the last moment by a hurtful word from a co-worker or boss, or an accident that completely discombobulated your efforts? And, how did you handle it?

What is the standard of success that guides your efforts in faith and trust? Is that the same standard that guides you in your family and/or job?

Have you ever been guilty of a negative attitude, or body language that speaks volumes about your displeasure and after making that offering found that it was totally uncalled for, unnecessary, and/or deeply disappointing to a spouse, child, co-worker or friend?

When was the last time part or all of the above transpired, and how long did it take for you to remember that IF you seek the Lord, his divine mercy will bless you with a capacity for forgiveness, for gentleness, with eyes capable of seeing his grace in the midst of it all?

It's not easy to compile a grace report in the midst of

turmoil or upheaval, but could those times be perhaps the richest opportunities for mining such grace?