

Three Cups of Tea: A New Paradigm for Mission

By Rev. Dr. Ken Henry

(Preached at Stone Church in Willow Glen, July 2007)

(Based on Luke 10:1-11, 16; Gal. 6:1-10; and *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace . . . One School at a Time*, by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin)

This morning I want to introduce you to a book written by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin. It's called *Three Cups of Tea* and I've already heard through the grapevine that a men's group at Stone Church is considering reading it as well as several others. I realize it's always dangerous recommending books to friends. Upon receiving a recommendation, we're suspicious about the recommender's motives—maybe he/she is sending a subtle message that we need to shape up or improve ourselves-- so instead of just telling us to "behave", she/he hands us a book instead. (i.e. "Here read this and you'll you know what I'm trying to say.")

A few years ago, a pastor friend of mine went to a session meeting where the elders gave him a 500 pg. book on how to improve one's preaching—And although he read it from cover to cover, he still wasn't clear about their motives. All this is to say that about a month ago, Heather was reading this book, and kept looking at me. "This really is your kind of book" she told me. And although I've never been a real tea-drinker, I read it and loved it. I loved it because not only is this book about mountaineering, travel, and adventure—my favorite subjects—but also about Greg Mortenson's journey which in many ways parallels the trials and challenges of pastoral ministry.

I'll try not to tell you everything about this book this morning, but my hope is that after today, your appetite would be thoroughly whetted and your curiosity peaked enough to explore further what Greg Mortenson has tried to accomplish in his endeavor to "promote peace" by building schools for children, particularly, for girls in the mountainous and dangerous border between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

I think this book has something to say to the "Church" and my prayer is that we would listen carefully, to Mortenson, to the village people of Pakistan, and to the divine wind which has been blowing and continues through places of need and human suffering.

One clear afternoon at the beginning August, Haji Ali [the chief of a small village] tapped Mortenson on the shoulder at the construction site and asked him to take a walk. The old man led the former climber uphill for an hour, on legs still strong enough to humble the much younger man. Mortenson felt precious time slipping away, and by the time Haji Ali halted on a narrow ledge high above the village, Mortenson was panting, as much from the thought of all the tasks he was failing to supervise as from his exertion.

Haji Ali waited until Mortenson caught his breath then instructed him to look at the view. Beyond K2, icy peaks . . . knifed relentlessly into the defenseless blue sky. . . .

Haji Ali reached up and laid his hand on Mortenson's shoulder. "These mountains have been here a long time and so have we. "You can't tell the mountains what to do," he said with an air of authority "You must learn to listen to them. So now I am asking you to listen to me. By the mercy of

Almighty Allah, you have done much for my people, and we appreciate it. But now you must do one more thing for me."

"Anything," Mortenson said.

"Sit down and shut your mouth," Haji Ali said. "You're making everyone crazy."

Then he reached out and took my plumb line, and my level and my account book and walked back down to the village. I followed him all the way to his house, worrying about what he was doing. He took the key he always kept around his neck on a leather thong, opened a cabinet. . . .and locked my things in there. . . then he asked someone to bring us tea.

When the porcelain bowls of scalding butter tea steamed in their hands, Haji Ali spoke: "If you want to thrive in Baltistan, you must respect our ways. [Remember] the first time you share tea with a Balti, you are a stranger. The second time you take tea, you are an honored guest. The third time you share a cup of tea, you become family and for our family, we are prepared to do anything even die.

Doctor Greg, you must make time to share three cups of tea."

(pp. 149-150)

Three Cups of Tea. The first time, you are a stranger, the second, an honored guest, and the third time, you become family. There are several underlying and obvious messages here in this Middle Eastern wisdom. One being that before we can build anything---a church, a school, a program, a business, or a vision for peace, one is wise to build trusting relationships first... and that takes time. In Pakistan's culture, Mortenson quickly learned that whether he was asking for guidance or obtaining building supplies or looking for a driver to take him over the mountain passes, he sometimes had to drink tea with his gracious hosts for 4-5 hours before settling on a price or sealing a deal or locating the right person.

Three Cups of Tea is a metaphor for negotiating agreements, engaging in meaningful dialogue, fruitful argument, discussion, and reconciliation—it's about knowing that the art of small talk can indeed lead to greater talk about much larger and more important issues. In the Christian faith, *Three Cups of Tea* is, I believe, what we mean by *Koinonia (Gk)* (i.e. the faithful and mutual sharing between believers)—In essence, it's what Acts 2:42 hints at: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

For this sermon's purposes, the *first cup of tea* is found in Luke 10:1-11, 16. This cup embodies the ancient rules of hospitality toward strangers and honored guests, but more poignantly, if we are a stranger or guest in someone's home, how we act toward others -- with humility and gratefulness. Call it a wedding tea, a special tea, a tea meant for getting to know someone.

This first cup of tea is the cup of respect and graciousness

There are certainly better passages of scripture to illustrate a New Testament understanding of proper table etiquette: Jesus feasting with the Pharisees, The Parable of the Great Banquet, The Last Supper, and or maybe something can be made of Jesus' words from Mark 9:41 "For truly I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ, will by no means lose his or her reward."

Nevertheless, however we understand mission and evangelism in the 21st century, however we define this first cup of tea, we know the Church's role in the world will always includes eating and drinking and staying with someone.

Greg Mortenson's story begins on a failed attempt to climb K2 in 1993. As Mortenson began to walk out, disappointed--over glaciers, through valleys of granite, scrambling across loose shale, he became disoriented. Even when he connected with his trusted porter, he was still uncertain, feeling the effects of altitude and exhaustion. In this dizzy state of being, Mortenson wandered into the village of Korphe where the people took him in. They served him cha and chapattis. The village children surrounded him, their smiles encouraged him to regain his strength, and then he said, "I will build a school [here]. I promise." (33)

The second cup of tea is a bit stronger-- gun power tea, English Breakfast, or even the dark tea in those small clear glasses I remember drinking when I was an exchange student to Turkey in 1978. This second cup of tea can be found in Galatians 6:1-11.

This cup contains the tea of forgiveness, letting go of grudges, and, ultimately, putting a greater value on gentleness over judgment and retribution.

Ps 86:15 reads, "But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."

James 1:19 advises: "You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger."

These texts emphasize leniency, patience, and restraint over direct confrontation and punishment.

Paul writes in Gal. 6:10: "So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith."

Aha! This second cup is what families do or try to do. And what wouldn't we do for our family? Would we forgive them? Die for them? What about simply sitting down and having a cup of tea with them? How about talking with our mom, our dad, our daughter, our son? Indeed, this second cup may be stringent to the taste, but it is thicker than water.

Jean Hoerni, a wealthy entrepreneur and acclaimed scientist who invested in building these schools, is also part of this story. In a unique and bonding way, Greg and Jean became steadfast friends—speaking plainly, forgiving mistakes, demanding much, but always expecting great things. On this death bed, suffering from a fatal form of leukemia" (176) Jean, an investor in the future of

Pakistan's well being, felt his greatest accomplishment in his life was helping to build a school in Central Asia.

"I love you like a son," Jean told Mortenson. There is more I could say about this man, but let it suffice that today his ashes flow by a small village in Pakistan, a village surrounded by icy peaks and where the echoing squeals of school children pierce the silence.

The third cup of tea is something I that came to me down at Peet's Coffee yesterday morning. Peet's offers teas which are classic, premium, and rare, and this last cup of tea is rare indeed--especially in world saturated by mass media and marketing, exponential growth in science and technology, and a world population well over 6 and half billion people—if you look at population growth studies over the last 180 years, that number should alarm us terms of our impact on the planet and the growing scarcity of resources.

This third cup of tea is simple—rare, but simple. It is the belief that change happens one person at a time.

The subtitle of this book *One Man's Mission to Promote Peace. . .One school at a Time* adds potency and body to this final cup. On the hardback version the byline was actually, *One Man's Mission to Fight Terrorism and Build Nations... One School at a Time*, but by the time it reached paperback, a new and more positive phrase was substituted. Now, I'm not quite at the point of suggesting to the pope that Greg Mortenson be canonized-- maybe a Nobel Peace Prize is the wings—but his approach to promote peace one school at a time, to reach out to one cab driver,

one Mullah or Muezzin—(i.e. Muslim clergy)
one hotel manager, one government official,
one wealthy investor, one tribal leader
one child
is something we all can do.

And I don't believe we have to travel abroad to start doing it. Reaching out to others one person at a time for a greater good is something we can do after we leave church today. And if not one person, if we're interested in promoting peace, we can go to the back of this book, then go to [www. penniesforpeace.org](http://www.penniesforpeace.org) and begin promoting peace one penny and one pencil at a time.

Jesus spoke in mysterious parables to his disciples about leaving a flock of 100 sheep in order to find the one lost sheep or sweeping a whole household in order to find one lost coin, but I don't think this approach is mysterious or requires us to great biblical scholarship--- it only requires that we become aware of those around us--- and to start believing again that change and mission begins with me, with you, one person at time. In 1993, Greg Mortenson helped a group people build one school. Today, there are 58 schools, 520 teachers, and 24,000 students, including 14,300 girls. When asked how this cause came to "fuel his life," Mortenson responds: "I have a quote on my bathroom mirror, and it says, "When your heart speaks, take good notes." So I try to adhere to that."

Thus, today or this week, when the heart speaks, let us all take good notes.
When we meet a stranger along the way, let us give him or her our time.
And if we are invited into someone's home and served tea-- in Pakistan, San Jose,
Willow Glen or wherever we may go—
May God make us truly grateful. Amen.

Please think about attending a lecture by Greg Mortenson

Saturday, November 17, 2007 at 11:00 and 2:00

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