

Earlier this month I had the opportunity to attend a Teammates Leadership Training event. It was held at Bellevue University. It was well worth my time. The focus, of course, was children and how we can nurture them. I attended a workshop on Poverty in America and one on Child Neglect and Abuse. I took a couple of insightful take-ways from each workshop. I then attended a workshop on details related to being a Board member for Teammates. Then mid-afternoon Coach Tom Osborne, the founder of Teammates, introduced the key-note speaker for the gathering, John Cook.

As you know, John Cook is the head coach for the University of Nebraska’s volleyball team. His presentation was sensational. He really tapped into the theme that we see emerging from the gospel lesson we read this morning, that is, “Confusion, Clarity, and Celebration.”

I was surprised with what Coach Cook started off by saying. Remember, in the last sixteen years he has lead the Cornhuskers to three national championships. When they are not winning a national championship they are always in the mix of the top teams in America. Therefore, when he started off by saying, “the longer I coach the less I know” I was surprised. He stated he is confused every now and then. He said, at times he is even confused if he should still be coaching. He noted that just last spring he had four players transfer to other schools. That made him question himself. Coach is a humble man as he admitted his confusion.

Regarding clarity he lifted up two things. First and foremost, he noted that the students on the 2015 team were entirely different from the students on his first team at Nebraska in 2000 when they won a National Championship. The i-phone, i-pad, Twitter, Instagram, EarPod generation communicates dramatically different from the 2000 class. They are a visual generation. Instead of providing instruction by talking, talking, talking he coaches by showing short videos and then practicing what was viewed. Communication with the current generation of student-athlete has been one form of clarity for Coach Cook.

The second point of clarity came to him during an early season loss to Texas last fall. He asked three of his starters to switch the positions they play on the court. In football terms he said it was like asking your starting quarterback to become a receiver and your starting running back to become a linebacker. It was a big change for the players but they did it. It was that new combination that laid the foundation for future success.

Confusion, clarity and then celebration. If you remember last December the Huskers reached their goal of making it to the Final Four being held at Center Link Center in Omaha. That was a season long goal. That was a celebration. Then they went on to win the National Championship. Coach Cook said the key to victory for the team was trust.

- players trusting the coaches
- coaches trusting their players
- players trusting their training
- players trusting the game plan
- players trusting their teammates
- players trusting themselves

Who did the Huskers beat in the National Championship game? That’s right, Texas. In Nebraska, it doesn’t get sweeter than beating Texas for a National Championship. Celebration, yes, celebration indeed.

These same dynamics of confusion, clarity and celebration are seen in our gospel lesson.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” Sunday morning, that first Easter morning, Mary goes to the tomb to anoint the body of

Jesus or maybe just cry. The tomb is open and the body is gone. She makes a mad dash back to the disciples and tells them the tomb is open, the body is gone and she has no idea where it might be. Confusion!

“Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.” These two disciples seem as dumbfounded as Mary.

Let me go off message just a bit so I can lift up a quirk in these verses we just read. These verses reference Peter and the other disciple. We all remember Peter as he was the leader of the disciples as recognized by Jesus during his ministry. But what about the “other disciple” referenced in this passage? The other disciple “outran Peter” to the tomb. The “other disciple,” who reached the tomb first, went in after Peter and then this “other disciple” saw and believed. What he believed we are not sure because the passage goes on to say “for as yet they did not understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead.” Anyway, the “other disciple” is first to the tomb and the first to believe. Although Peter is noted as the lead disciple this “other disciple” seems very special. Who is the “other disciple?” You are right if you guessed John. The author of the Gospel of John humbly places himself in a good light as he shares the Easter morning story.

As they return home they seem to be as confused as Mary. The body of Jesus is no longer in the tomb but where could it be.

The confusion continues even when Mary addresses two angels at the tomb.

“But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”

Even after addressing the angels Mary is still confused and the confusion even continues when she is addressed by Jesus, himself.

When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Yet confusion is about to give way to clarity.

Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Boom, it not a gardener but it is Jesus! Crystal clear clarity! It is Jesus. The one she saw crucified as she wept at the foot of the cross is standing before her. It is Jesus. He is not in the tomb. He is not dead. He is alive!

Crystal clear clarity has dawned upon Mary this first Easter morning and she is excited to share it. Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her. Can you imagine the celebration that ensued? Jesus, the crucified one is now Jesus the resurrected one!

Confusing moments, we all have them. When we have confusing moments we are in good company. John Cook, national championship coach, experienced confusing moments even during the season of his third national championship. Mary, Peter, and John (followers of Jesus for three years) experienced confusing

moments even on the morning of the resurrection. Confusing moments are part and parcel of the human experience. When you or I are confused let us turn to God for clarity. When you or I are confused let us have faith that clarity will come to pass. And when it does we will celebrate just as the Huskers celebrated at the Century Link Center. When clarity does come we will celebrate just like the followers of Jesus did in the Upper Room that first Easter morning.

Confusion, clarity and celebration are the mysteries and the gifts of life. This Easter morning we celebrate both the mystery and the clarity of the new life we have in Jesus, the Resurrected One.

As we ponder the gift of new life in Christ let us remain seated as we sing verse one of Hymn #314, "In the Garden."