

Arctic Adventure

Do you like to tell or hear good stories? I do; especially if there is a spiritual lesson to be learned. Perhaps you can enjoy this one.

Twenty years ago, my employer had a bad habit of selling equipment into some of the strangest areas of the world. Year after year we would sell equipment headed for the Arctic in the dead of winter. That's not so bad, except guess who got to train the operators how to use this equipment? You guessed it! Year after year I found myself training two shifts, 12 hours each. (I think it was about my third trip when I finally figured out that the two 12 hour shift scenario presented a problem.)

Before you get tuned into the story, get your "map-ball" out. (That's what my children call the globe.) Look for Prudhoe Bay up on the North Eastern shore of Alaska. Then keep going North a little ways. That's where the action is. Which story would you like to hear? About the Arctic fox? The polar bears? The Exxon executive that fell into the Arctic water!?! The annual celebration called the "Fur Rendezvous"? Stranded for two weeks?!?

In the winter, the temperature is between -30 and -40. Don't ask if that's Fahrenheit or Centigrade. At that temperature, it's cold. It doesn't matter which scale. (Fahrenheit and Centigrade are actually the same at -40.) The ocean is frozen 10 feet thick. The water under the ice is exactly 0 Fahrenheit. (The temperature where sea water freezes is the definition of 0 Fahrenheit.)

With temperatures this cold, the air is practically perfectly dry. The slightest breeze blows the snow off the ice and a "white out" occurs! Everything is pure white. You can't see 10 feet in front of you. For this reason, we were instructed to always carry a few days of food and supplies with us; just in case a white out prevents the choppers from flying in to pick us up. We each carried a whole grocery bag of food with us each and every morning, but it was always consumed by noon. In that environment the body burns 8000 calories a day! What a great weight loss program!!! Eat 7500 calories every day and still lose weight! It's great! (Until you bring the hunger/habit back home.)

"Why were we out on that ice in the winter instead of the summer?" you may ask. Well, if we went in the summer, the ice would melt, the sleds would fall into the sea, and the equipment would be lost! Believe it or not, it was easier to work on the stationary ice in the winter than on a floating ship in the summer. (Of course they never asked for my opinion on that subject.)

So what spiritual lesson do we learn from this? Probably nothing yet. (If you have thought of one, please let me know and I'll add it next time.) The lesson comes from the oil companies. But, before we get to that part of the story, let me explain the symbiotic relationship between the tundra and the permafrost.

The tundra is not only a region. It is the name of a plant that dominates that region. The Tundra is an extremely fragile plant. Too much water will drown it, too much heat will fry it, but it doesn't mind the extreme cold at all. (That could make an interesting research project for someone. How God designed the Tundra to survive the bitter cold.)

The Tundra is so fragile that if you walk on it, it dies at every foot step. We saw photographs of the

tracks of a renegade jeep. (You thought 4-wheelin' was a modern phenomena, didn't you.) The photo's just looked like a set of tire tracks the first year. What you couldn't tell from the photos, was that the Tundra in those tracks was dead. The Tundra provides the insulation the permafrost needs to stay frozen. As the permafrost slowly melts in the summer, the Tundra gets just enough water to sustain life. If the Tundra dies, the permafrost melts too quickly leaving a puddle. The puddle drowns the adjacent Tundra!

The photos taken a year later show no individual jeep tracks. Now there is a 10' wide stream. Then tragedy hit in the third year. A river that used to supply all the water to a local town had been completely rerouted away - - - All because of one inconsiderate 4-wheeler on the Tundra! Obviously, there are very strict rules about disturbing/protecting the Tundra!

Back to the oil companies. For this reason, the oil companies are not permitted to have oil wells on the arctic shore during the summer. They can produce oil in the winter, but before the spring thaw, all the equipment and people have to leave the Tundra. As you can imagine, this makes oil production on the arctic expensive. Consequently, we were working "offshore" where there is no Tundra. The oil companies had to fill that pipeline somehow. Pumping year round from the bay made a lot of sense.

Now for the spiritual lesson. The Soviet Union also had its Tundra. Theirs was also oil rich. But notice the verbs "had" and "was." They practically destroyed their entire Tundra. The Tundra was so devastated it made extracting oil practically impossible. Our own Arctic had two major U.S. oil fields; one operated by Amoco, the other by Exxon. They maintained enough common sense to protect that sensitive environment. The Amoco and Exxon fields were pristine clean. (Or close.) The areas of the Tundra that were disturbed were always packed with gravel. Gravel is an effective insulator for the permafrost and prevents damage to the adjacent Tundra.

What determined the stark contrast between these two categories of oil fields? Could it be respect for God's green earth? The Soviet's Godless society exploited it for all it was worth with no thought for tomorrow. On the other hand, the U.S. companies, to some degree, are still led by Christian principles. That stark contrast is profound! How we view our origins affects how we treat His creation!

I haven't been back in about 20 years. With the new age "Love your Mother Earth" ideology prevalent today, there is probably a third contrast now. It wouldn't surprise me if there is currently an effort to remove all evidence of man in the region. Bumper stickers probably say, "Save the baby Tundra" and the Tundra is probably the "Northern Altar".

Yes, our view of origins determines our respect for His creation AND how we treat it.

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him. Col 1:16

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