

A Word from Mack

Leo Tolstoy was the toast of all of Russia and of the sophisticates of the Western world as well. He had written *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, and a virtual plethora of other works. He had vast estates, wealth beyond counting, and fawning admirers everywhere. By his mid-forties he had everything but meaning in his life. He became obsessively suicidal. He recounts his journey to the light in his classic work, *A Confession*.

In this moving autobiographical window to his soul, he compares human existence to a journey across some great river too wide to see the far shore. All of us must cross this river. It is the river of life. All of us are provided our boats which we must learn to row in order to complete the crossing. But the river is so wide that we can row for many years and not see the other side. And the current is very strong.

Tolstoy wrote that as the days roll into years we begin to forget that our destiny is to land on the far shore and we give in to the temptation of shipping our oars and simply lying down to let the current of life take control. We drift. And we are surrounded by such a multitude of drifters that it begins to appear to be the normal flow of life. The key, he said, is to awaken to our true destiny and destination, grab our oars and pull against the deadly drift. The going is hard every day but the irony is that we begin to appropriate the strength of the stream into our arms. This brings new sharpness of thought and self worth begins to blossom as we row.

Rather than commit suicide, Tolstoy, now aware of the drift to emptiness in his life, began to search relentlessly for meaning. He saw that his serfs and servants had meaning and though simple in their lives and beliefs, he determined to find their secret. He became a serf on his own estate and lived out his days living in their midst! It was in this period that he wrote, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, and *The Gospel In Brief*, and *What I Believe*, three magnificently compelling essays which share the meaning of life in breathtaking simplicity.

I must tell each of you that I wake up every day and I just flat out marvel. I am seeing you and scores and hundreds and thousands of folks just like you. And you are sitting up and rowing with all of your might and will to reach the destination which God has intended. I am only too proud to join in your company. And some might ask, "Just what is your destiny? Where are you going?" The answer is simple.

I remember telling it to one of the mayors of our city one day as he wondered aloud about Community Renewal's mission. "Mayor," I said, "I am not here to get rich. I am not hungry for power. And I don't crave fame. I am on planet earth for one reason. I am here to partner with God in making this whole world a place where every precious little baby can be safe and loved. And there is a whole bunch of us who are giving our lives for that cause." That is the shore toward which we must all row. And now I know with absolute certainty that when we begin to row, then in some mysterious and wonderful way, the Source of all creation begins to live within us and give us strength for the journey. And joy unspeakable.

I am so glad that we are on this journey together. It is a great adventure as well as a struggle worth the devotion of our lives. What happens here can change the world. God bless you all.