



October 24, 2010

### MINUTE FOR MISSION – WHO’S TEACHING WHO?

Whenever I visit my friend the farmer, I ask myself, “What’s going to happen on this visit?” I have come to expect the unexpected. It’s not because my farmer friend is odd or unconventional – in many respects, he is the most conventional of men. He does, however, enjoy a joke or two, as long as it is not at his expense. His favourite target for a practical joke is his wife; I’m running a close second, so I try to be on my toes when I’m out there.

Several weeks ago, I drove out to the farm while he was combining beans. He introduced me to another man who was there to help – another farmer who did custom combining work. Then we walked out to the yard and my friend showed me his combine. The combine is a JD, I can’t remember the model number, but it is only a couple of years old and the header on the combine is 30 feet wide. There was another combine of similar size parked nearby that belonged to the custom guy. Together, the two machines covered 60 feet in each run up and down the field of beans.

My friend invited me to get up into the cab of his combine and it was like climbing to the second story of a house. The cab was roomy, comfortable, air conditioned and reminded me of an aircraft cockpit. He asked if I wanted to drive the combine for a couple of passes and I told him no. Frankly, I was intimidated by the size of the machine and not at all certain I could operate it without doing damage or embarrassing myself. “No”, I said – “no thanks, not me”. He looked at me and said, “There’s nothing to be afraid of...it’s easier than driving your truck – a monkey could do it”. And then he smiled at me.

Five minutes later he had run me through the steps of operating the combine. It was a truly modern machine – no gear shift, just hydrostatic transmission, 4 wheel drive and all wheel steer. Air ride suspension that was so soft, you had to be careful about dozing off. I was left with only one question: “How do I keep it in a straight line?” He smiled again and said, “That’s the best part.” He pressed a button and a screen lighted up on the dash – he said “there’s the GPS. It’s calibrated to the width of the combine header. You just keep the arrow on that mark and you’ll always be on line, give or take 2 centimeters.”

I looked at him in disbelief & wonder...this sophisticated agribusiness-man was the same stubborn farmer who regarded cordless drills as “new fangled gadgets” and more often than not pumps drinking water by hand from a cistern pump. It was a face of him I had not seen.

In any case, away we went and my time as a combine operator passed quickly and without incident. I panicked a bit at the end of the first run when I had to turn the combine, but the machine spun on a dime with less effort than my pickup truck, just as promised.

When I left later that afternoon, I reflected on how little I actually knew my farmer friend. I had him pegged for a bit of a stick in the mud, someone who would not adapt easily to change. In some respects that might be true, but when it came to something he loved and lived – farming – he was right at home with modern techniques. I marvelled a bit at how easily he learned new technology, his willingness to be taught and his eagerness to teach me. If there is a moral to this story, I think it is about being open to change, to be willing to learn and seizing the opportunities to teach. We all have it in us to be teacher and student and we ought not to miss the chance to be either.

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