

The Cemetery at the End of the Road – August 2015

This week I have the wonderful privilege of spending a few days in the North Carolina Mountains. I'm in a beautiful house with beautiful views and a gravel road that leads up the mountain. This is good because I am a sucker for a mountain road or path – I just love to walk in the mountains. I've done some "real" hiking on the Appalachian Trail, but any mountain walking does me good. In fact, two of the best balms for my soul are mountain paths and mountain creeks.

Today I was up before anyone else so I dressed quietly, grabbed a walking stick and headed out. It was a steady climb at first and my Florida body wasn't quite ready for it, but for every uphill there is a downhill so I eventually got into a good rhythm. No people, but I met three rabbits, numerous butterflies and birds, and lots of spider webs I didn't see but found anyway. I was mostly walking through woods with an occasional view across mountain vistas. Then I entered a cove, which must have been cleared out long ago, and was likely some mountain family's homestead in the past. This was borne out as I rounded a curve and the road ended at a family cemetery.

It was a quiet place, fenced and well-tended having been recently mown, and there were plastic flowers at each grave. Strangely enough, there was a staked solar light at each grave – must be an interesting sight at night. There were about two dozen graves in the plot including two children who died twenty years apart but were buried next to each other. The oldest burial on a stone I could read dated to 1900 with the most recent in 2014.

What really struck me was that the road ended at the plot. Even the most unimaginative person can sense the irony of a road ending at a cemetery. That's the way so many people look at life: it's a long (or short) road, with uphills and downhills, beauty and ugliness (spiders), but it always ends in death. That much is true, but for the believer it is not the end of the road. We know that beyond that cemetery there is another place where life continues.

As I looked around I noticed something to the left of the gate – an overgrown but still useable path. It brought to mind Matthew 7:14: *"For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."* It was a narrow path and not easily spotted, but, to me, it represents the path we are called to follow, the path that leads through the cemetery to our final home. Unfortunately, few will find it, but it is the responsibility of each believer to show people that path.

Life is a journey but it's up to each of us where that journey takes us. The road doesn't end at the cemetery; the path continues upward to a more beautiful place that holds wonderful promise and hope. The cemetery is only a transition point, a gate to that better place that God prepared for us. Come join me on that narrow path.