

“She Will Sing Better in an Owl Suit”

Christ the Redeemer Church
December 6, 2009
2nd Sunday in Advent

Malachi 3:1-4
Rev Gary L. Smith
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Last night at the church-wide Advent/Christmas/Birthday party Mark let the kids assist him in setting off several hundred dollars worth of spectacular commercial level fireworks. The drought has kept Mark from shooting off these fireworks for two years. Originally these fireworks were purchased to celebrate the return home from Iraq for James, son of Mark and Tommie. So last night it was fireworks time!

The kids loved it all. What I liked was when Mark would light one fuse and then suddenly yell out “Uh oh. This is gonna be a big one. RUN!” and everyone would take off running because something huge was about to happen.

So we light the Second Advent candle today. Something is about to happen suddenly.

“Suddenly the Lord you are looking for will come to the Temple...” writes the author of the last book in what we call the Old Testament.

Suddenly.

Suddenly our lives do change. Suddenly a dear friend becomes very ill and our entire view of the future, and even our future, changes.

Suddenly another human being greatly lets us down and shocks us, with actions that threaten to destroy our very existence. Suddenly someone does something to our child and we would like to gather all the armies of the world to go settle the score. Suddenly nothing else matters in life except for our obsession with easing the pain of others.

Suddenly we long for God but we have no compass to go by.

Suddenly.

A couple of Seasons ago I was in Auburn and I showed up at Amity’s work at noon and the reception desk staff asked if they could help me. I told them I was there to take someone out to lunch. One attractive lady, about my age, suddenly jumped up and said, “You can take me to lunch. I will go with you!” I was stunned. It all happened so suddenly. I busted out laughing. I took Amity out for lunch. We all still laugh about the eager woman who offered to go out to lunch with me. That laugh that day greatly helped all of us.

That same lady approached Amity this past week and said to Amity’s back, “Do you want to meet the love of my life?” Amity knew her voice and was surprised to think that she was dating suddenly.

Amity turned around and the friend said, "Amity, This is my father. He is the love of my life." A grey haired and distinguished man in his 70's stood there with his hand out to meet Amity.

Amity got tears in her eyes, shook his hand, and turned away suddenly to go back to her patient waiting in the chair so that she would not cry anymore. She never tears up at work. She told me later "I guess I am ready to come home for Christmas, Dad."

Suddenly we get ready to come Home from time to time. Randy says that this time of the year people smile a little bit more. We all long to go home.

Heather Murray Elkins, professor of worship and preaching at Drew University Theological School in New Jersey writes in her book *Holy Stuff of Life* about the time she and her husband visited England. They were in a church exchange program and were visiting a Methodist superintendent and his wife in England. All salaries are equal in the English Methodist system so most ministers and spouses can not afford to buy their own home so most finish their life and life's work in Preacher's Homes. The superintendent was showing Heather the choice of homes they were considering. Dr. Elkins noted that the superintendent's wife would have nothing to do with it. So Dr. Elkins attempted to say something innocuous like "It must be hard to resettle at the end of life..." His wife said, "Oh no, that is not the problem. I am used to moving. But can you imagine having to grow old surrounded by people who think that life is an occasion for sermons?"

That story makes me nervous a bit.

I made a mistake this week. I wanted to use little Katie for a newspaper photo about our upcoming Christmas play. She is five years old and is photogenic and has a voice which is angelic and in perfect pitch. She is an angel in the play and will be singing a cappella the song *Jesus Loves Me* while standing by the live baby Jesus in our What if Jesus Had Been Borned in Texas play. I had a buffalo and a wise man in a robe and fireman's hat and a rifle and a pistol for the photo...the rifle and pistol are for the wise man to shoot a buffalo in the play should a buffalo appear. Which it will. The kids wrote this portion of the play with great imagination and unbridled enthusiasm.

Anyway, I wanted Katie in the photo so we just stuck the owl's suit on her for the newspaper. Just for the shot. But she is not really an owl in the play. She is an angel.

Betty told me Thursday that now Katie thinks she is a singing owl. I told Betty that Katie will not be wearing the owl's suit. I put it on her just for the photo. For publicity. For the paper. Not for real. Just a public relations piece.

Betty said, "Katie will sing better with the owl's suit on. She thinks she is an owl now that you put the suit on her. She will sing better with the owl suit on."

Problem was I already committed the owl suit to another child. No, I have not solved this yet. I am one owl suit short for the Christmas play.

My neighbor Amy putting up decorations in her front yard yesterday. She had been married for several years and her husband got up one morning and suddenly announced he was leaving. Her world was destroyed. That was years ago. She is a very sweet Mississippi woman whose mother lives with her. Due to her job, our neighbor travels much and her mother is alone often. We depend on each other. Her 85-year-old mother travels annually to attend the Berlin Air Lift Reunion. Her husband flew in the Berlin Air Lift. Lives were suddenly changed in that post-war effort to save the lives of millions.

Amy announced to me yesterday that she was getting married February 21st. To a great guy who is a Country and Western singer who also travels a lot on the road. I asked her if she had a minister to do the wedding. She teared up. This grown woman teared up. She said, "Gary, we wanted to ask you but I did not want you to feel obligated." I told her I normally don't ask such a question out of not wanting to impose or intrude but that I would be honored to do her wedding for them.

Suddenly Christmas made sense to me again. Giving life another chance. Risking again in life. Putting on the owl suit again in life to sing again. It is an honor to be part of such a story called Life.

The Child was born to remind us of The Love of God that surrounds us. A light in the darkness. A Glimmer of Hope. Fun. Joy. Buffalos at the manger.

We all sing better in life in an owl suit. Who wants to face our world stark naked without friends or without Hope?

We all sing better in an owl suit. I need a second owl suit, by the way. Somebody please help me.

Amen.