

August Sweet Tea

Christ the Redeemer Church
August 16, 2009
Texas Brown Time/11th Sunday after Pentecost

John 6:51-59
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I like to wear this Trout Stole each year after our week at the cabin.

(During Prayer Time this morning when our members share publicly prayer requests and then the entire church responds, "Lord, hear our Prayer" a man named Greg O'Brien, age 30, broke down crying as he told of losing his job – a Landscaping company, losing his house, and now losing his family as he and his wife have had to geographically separate in order to be able to provide care for the three children. He and his youngest child have moved in with his mother Sharon O'Brien. His wife and two older children have moved in with her mother in Austin. Greg is trying to find jobs to make money and to also seek financial aid to go to nursing college here. Greg is open to any odd jobs that any one might have right now. Greg thanked the Church for being a place where he was welcomed and accepted. Lord, this is a real prayer. Amen.)

This is not like the church our grandparents grew up in. Things change. Jesus told the crowd in this morning's reading as they questioned his teachings and ways, "This is not like the bread your grandparents ate." This is not your grandparent's church. This is your life. These are your challenges.

Years ago a grandfather farmer took his wife and grandson to the big city for the first time to see and shop in the high rise buildings. Inside a high rise building on the first floor, the farmer and his young son were standing around while the grandmother browsed through the store. An elderly woman walked up to the wall by them, pushed a bottom and the wall magically opened and the grandmother-aged woman walked into the wall and the door closed behind her.

Stunned to see the wall just open up and swallow the elderly lady, the grandfather just stared at the wall that had opened and closed. Suddenly the wall opened again and out walked a beautiful, shapely 22-year-old girl. Drop dead gorgeous. The farmer was shocked and could hardly speak but said to his grandson "Boy, run and grab your grandma quickly and get her to go into that wall!"

Life surprises us. Last Tuesday Robert the home umpire in our league championship series had to go home after the second game. He is my age and he suffered a heart attack a few weeks ago. While being treated for this his second heart attack his kidneys and liver became infected from the dye used during the treatment of his heart. It has been a long month for him, his wife, and his teenage son with no guarantees or more innings.

Wednesday I called him and invited him and his wife Rose to lunch. His choice. He chose China Palace as he loves Chinese food. We met there. He wanted to know what the

reason for the lunch was. I told him he had had a long summer and that I wanted to have lunch with him and meet his wife Rose.

He and I arrived first and then Rose arrived. I was telling her how I met her husband on the softball field when I was coaching and he was umpiring. Robert interrupted me and said to her, "Yeah, and I did not like Gary when I first met him." I was stunned.

I told him and Rose that was the exact reaction that Pam had years ago...she did not like me when she first met me. I tried too hard in life. We all want to be accepted, liked, and valued. I tried too hard. Someone later in life asked Pam why she married me if she did not like me at first. She said, "Because he would not go away."

Lunch was going very different than I had anticipated.

First time I met Robert the umpire was when I was yelling at him for one of his calls against us in a game a few years back. Robert said at lunch, "And now here we are having lunch together." And now Robert and his wife Rose are worshipping with us this morning. Life surprises us, doesn't it? This is not our grandparent's church.

Thursday night I got invited by some Kyle boys to play on their team in a golf tournament after work. I really liked being included. At my age I am happy to be included in anyone's life. Each of us wants to be included and accepted. I was honored they asked me to play. They even asked me over to a friend's house after golf to watch the Dallas Cowboys pre-season game. I was honored to be asked.

Late at night when I was feeling pretty included one of the guys named Pinky said, "You know it is great being with a preacher on the golf course and at this game party." I felt good and included. Then his wife Melanie called and I could hear her say on the phone, "Where in the heck are you?????" He said, "I am with the preacher." And she said, "Oh, then that is OK." And she got off the phone. I just stared at him.

I then realized he and the boys are just using me as a preacher to cover for their outings. He said, "Yeah, when our wives call us and ask us where in the heck we are and what in the heck are we doing and why in the heck aren't we home then I just say 'Honey, I am with the preacher right now.' And then it is all fine with her. She always wanted me in church."

My balloon was popped. I realized then that I had only been invited to play golf and to the football party as a preacher excuse. Pinky told me every wife is happy if their husband is with the preacher. So the boys figured out to just invite the preacher to their evening get-aways.

I could not believe the boys used me as an excuse. That was lame.

We have to take care of each other. Pam told me a story this week that a teacher told her.

A story heard on the radio. A man paralyzed in an auto wreck was placed in a nursing home and was depressed over his condition. His roommate who had a bed by the window kept trying to cheer up the paralyzed man. Finally one day the roommate started telling the paralyzed man about what was going on out in the world as he described what he could see out the window. The roommate told stories of the outside world to help pull the paralyzed man out of his depression.

One day he told of a family walking together to their car. Another day he told of a little boy flying a kite in the wind. Another day he told of a boy taking his dog on a walk by the hospital. Another day he described two young people kissing in the parking lot.

Then one day there was no story as the story teller died. The paralyzed man asked to be moved to the window so he could see the things told to him by the story teller. The paralyzed man asked the nurse to move him to the window and to open the window shades so he too could see out. When the nurse opened the shades all that was there was a wall completely blocking the window. All the paralyzed man could see was a wall.

He was shocked and asked the nurse when the wall was put up and told of all the things his roommate would describe to him. The nurse said, "Sir, your roommate was blind. He could not see anything."

Even when we are blind we can help others to see by telling stories of Hope and of Life.

Life is short. Life is precious. God is grace. "This is not your grandparent's church or life." This is your life. Now. Help others. Live fully for the good of others.

Every August about this time when the sweet corn is ready to eat and the hay is ready to be baled and after summer ball is over and school is about to start and we feel summer heat will never end I preach a sermon about my grandpa. We would work in the hayfield all day in the hot sun and then come into the house for dinner and have sweet tea together after he gave God thanks for all of God's blessings in life. It was so refreshing. Grandpa never talked in the fields. He just worked and came back to the house, prayed and drank sweet tea. I try to work as a preacher like he did as a farmer. Not say too much, just do my job and come home give Thanks for Life and have some sweet tea. He never told me he loved me but I knew he did. I never told him I loved him but I think he knew that I did.

When I got into the car late Thursday night in Kyle to go home way later than I had said I would be home, the phone rang. It was Pam. She sounded like Melanie and asked where in the heck I was at this hour. I said, "Pam, I am with the Kyle boys. They needed a preacher tonight and I felt I needed to be there for them as a preacher in their hour of need." She said, "Okay. I understand. Take your time." They used me and I used them. That is life! The Kyle boys were my cover now. It worked. It is called Ministry.

Welcome back to the House. It is a hot and tough field out there. Have some Bread. Drink from the Cup of Life. And take a glass of sweet tea which will be served to you after you

take Communion this morning. Welcome back to the House. Amen.