

“Don’t Forget to Park in the Shade”

Christ the Redeemer Church
November 1, 2009
All Saint’s Day/22nd Sunday after Pentecost

John 11:32-44
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Last year for Christmas I received this beautiful 2009 Inspirational Calendar from Carla, Reese, and Sydney Roberts. It hangs right beside my desk in my home office. I get to look at it every week when creating bulletins and church calendars, and writing sermons. It is inspiration to me. It is a Boston Red Sox Baseball calendar. Photos and statistics of the Boston Red Sox players. I love it.

After I opened it last year Sydney said, “Go to November 1st date and look what we wrote on it.” I did. It reads, “Order Advent Calendars.”

Last year I forgot to order or purchase Advent calendars in time for Advent. Some of you may recall that I drove something like 367 miles one Friday in December from here to College Station to San Antonio and back to San Marcos to try and locate some Advent Calendars for all of our children. Everyone was sold out.

I ended up finding 50 Advent Calendars – not authentic German Advent calendars as I wanted -- here in San Marcos at a store but the price was high. The manager and I cut a deal – I pleaded Church Mercy – and he gave me the 50 calendars at a great discount. Then some of you adults complained because you did not receive one.

Janice emailed me last week and wrote “Don’t forget to order Advent Calendars on November 1st.” Preachers always have lots of direction and bosses in life.

2009 is almost over. Some of you are very glad this year is finally almost over. Some of your losses and challenges this year have been almost too much to bear.

When Jesus gave new life to Lazarus then the friends of Lazarus were told how to help out. They were told to move the stones away from the tomb. They were then told to take the bandages off of their friend Lazarus so that he could be freed up to live his new life.

It was up to the friends to help out. Lazarus was given new life but his friends had to move the stone from the tomb and they had to take off his bandages to allow him to live. As we love and welcome and accept people it frees them up to live life as God intends.

Jesus spoke often to family and friends about how to help each other. Move the stone. Unwrap those who are wrapped up in bandages of fear and loneliness. Hold the hands of your children as they grow up. Friends and family can help each other. I don’t have much more to preach about than friends and family.

Pam and I were at the Texas Book Festival yesterday in Austin. Beautiful day. Some of

her family and friends of her family were there. They made me promise they would not be included in today's sermon. What happens in Austin stays in Austin, they said.

What am I going to preach about if I can not tell stories about family and friends?

One of Pam's parent's friends said, "Gary, none of this better come out in tomorrow's sermon." Pam said, "All of our friends say that. They are all scared to be with us." She is so supportive.

So I am not telling any stories from yesterday. What happens in Austin stays in Austin.

But I will tell you that I was abandoned by all family and friends yesterday. I was sitting by myself on the park bench in front of the Capital Building. Blue sky. Beautiful day. Thousands of people. But Pam and her family and her family's friends all abandoned me.

I was sitting alone on the bench. You can be alone in a crowd. I loved watching people. There were many Halloween costumes. Beautiful sunny, cloudless day.

She was about 5 years old and had on a cute tiger costume with a long tail. Her head was down. She was making tiger noises. Her mother would ask her what a cat sounded like. She would purr. Mom asked what a dog sounded like. She would bark. Hand in hand, they laughed and made animal noises. The little girl was loved and secure in it. They were having so much fun as the little girl walked in costume, tapping her cane on the ground and laughing with her mom.

Have you ever seen a little girl in a tiger suit with a white cane? The little girl was blind. She was walking hand in hand with a saint of a mom who was holding her tight and teaching her to laugh and mimic animals and to love Halloween and to enjoy the sounds of the day and to walk into a Hopeful future. Her mother looked saintly to me clasping her blind daughter's hand and laughing with her.

When Amity called me at 6:30 am on Wednesday morning this week and asked me if I knew that Scott Anderson had lymphoma cancer, I said I did not. Within minutes he and I were talking on the phone. He was at work. We have been through a lot together in the Air Force, working and raising kids and being Church. Doing our jobs.

After we talked I had to do something. So I went outside and piled bricks. I have had a pile of bricks in a heaped up pile. They have been piled there for months, waiting to be stacked neatly. I spent a couple of hours moving the brick pile to inside the back yard and I neatly stacked them one by one in a neat pile for future use.

I just wanted to turn some mess in life into a neat stack of order. I felt better after neatly stacking the bricks. Each brick was a prayer given without a word spoken.

God gives life and our job is to help each other. I wish I could fix blind girls. I wish I

could fix disease. I wish I could fix fractured lives and marriages. I wish I could make order out of chaos in our lives.

I told Scott that he needs to do three things. Cuss, enjoy his farm, and laugh. Scott thanked me for telling him to cuss, which he has done. And he jumped on his tractor and drove it around his farm yesterday.

I was so excited to drive 47 miles to San Antonio on Friday and to buy 100 Advent Calendars at the Randolph Air Force Base commissary. Authentic Made in German Advent Calendars. I got them and put them in our truck and drove to a restaurant.

I was so excited to call Janice and tell her I got the calendars. I called her from inside the restaurant. As soon as I told her she said, **“Don’t forget to park in the shade.”** Don’t you just hate it when a person reminds you of one little mistake you made 360 days ago? Last year after I finally got the Calendars then I parked in the sun and many of the chocolates inside the Calendars melted and were ruined. Preachers have so many bosses like Janice.

So I called my own son Daniel to tell him I got the calendars. Daniel would not have the crappy kind of response that Janice had. I told him I got the calendars and that I was so excited. He said, **“Don’t forget to park in the shade.”** He was in Germany last year and was not even around! But he remembered *reading* about the melted Calendars last year.

And I thought no one listened to or remembered sermons.

After talking to Janice and Daniel I went back out and moved my truck full of Chocolate Calendars out of the sun and to a parking spot in the shade. The calendars would have melted in the sun.

Amen.