

## *Folding 22 T-Shirts Every Week*

Christ the Redeemer Church  
October 18, 2009  
20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Green

Mark 10:35-45  
Rev Gary L. Smith  
[www.christredeemerchurch.com](http://www.christredeemerchurch.com)

*(I folded 22 wrinkled Bright Yellow t-shirts on a table in front of the congregation while giving this sermon. After the sermon and during communion, three congregants asked me if they could bring over some laundry to me to fold. One guy offered to pay me.)*

It really is about doing and seeing the basic, simple things in life. Two of the disciples wanted Jesus to do them a favor...they wanted to sit right by God for eternity in the Kingdom. They really did. They wanted big things and prominent seating. Power is what those two sought. Jesus told them to focus on doing the small things in life.

Let's face it. Most all of us at one time or another has liked the idea of being close to someone with some power. Most of us have name-dropped a time or two in life. The Teacher told them to focus on being of benefit to others in life. The simple things.

First thing is, it is important who you follow in life. This past week I wanted to go to San Antonio to see Barbara after her surgery. I know my way around San Antonio and the hospital circuit. Part of the job. But I volunteered to follow Micky down to the hospital to see his wife. I like following someone else in traffic sometimes because then I do not have to think. Just tail and drive and daydream. No thinking.

All went well until we hit a traffic jam on Loop 410. We got separated. Within a half mile or so, I got back behind Micky's black truck. Easy.

Easy until he took a wrong turn. I turned to follow him, assuming that he was either lost or had to make a stop or that they had built a new hospital. I just followed him closely in case he was lost. I could help him.

Micky pulled into a hotel parking lot. So I pulled in right beside him and waited for him to get out of the truck. He never got out. We both just sat there. Finally I peered more closely into Micky's truck...it was not Micky. I had been following the wrong truck. Guy just stared back at me. I did not look him in the eye.

Pinky asked me later if I got out and talked to the guy. Shoot no, I did not get out. We were in San Antonio, I had just stalked a guy all the way to a hotel and he probably had a guy waiting for me. I just left. Important to follow the right person in life.

Just focus on doing the simple things in life.

Last week during Parent Conferences, the mother and father of a child were sitting there talking with Mrs. Smith. The mother was talking and the father was just there, not

engaging much. The mother asked Mrs. Smith if they needed to pay for the t-shirts. Mrs. Smith said, “No, the t-shirts were donated by a business here in town. My husband washes, dries, and folds them each week and has them ready for each Friday for us.”

That woke up the father. He raised his eyebrows and made a face. The mother asked for clarification by saying, “Your **husband** does the t-shirts?” Pam loved it.

Pam said, “Yes. My husband learned to fold t-shirts in the military and he folds cloths better than I do. And he is good at it.” The husband just looked at Pam.

Pam is good. She learned long ago that I was so starved for her compliments that if she just told me I cooked breakfast well once then I would cook breakfast forever. If she complimented me on how well I folded t-shirts then I would fold t-shirts forever.

I married a very coy, smart, perceptive and manipulative kindergarten teacher. Kindergarten teachers have to be that way to survive.

It takes 21 minutes to wash these t-shirts. It takes 59 minutes to dry them in our dryer.

Each Friday Pam takes the 22 washed, dried, and neatly folded t-shirts to her class for her 22 kindergarten students to wear that day. They wear them each Friday and she brings the dirty t-shirts back home to be washed, dried, and folded before the next Friday.

These bright yellow t-shirts have the words Mrs. Smith’s Starfish on the front along with a drawing of a Starfish. On the back are the words and logo for Rudy’s Automotive Shop. Rudy and his wife Becky donate these t-shirts each year to Mrs. Smith’s class. Last year was the first year Mrs. Smith asked Rudy to donate the cost of these t-shirts. Rudy and Becky immediately said “yes” to the request to donate. Costs about \$7 per shirt. Most of Mrs. Smith’s students could not afford the cost of such a nice shirt as these.

Mrs. Smith had the students write a thank-you poster to Rudy and Becky. Photos were taken of the class in their t-shirts and included on the poster. Rudy took down all of his Outstanding Business plaques, his Chamber of Commerce Appreciation plaques, and his Recognition plaques on his automotive repair shop wall in order to make room for his one huge Thank-You poster. He is very proud of this huge Thank You card.

Every time I see Mrs. Smith’s students they smile and thank me for their t-shirts. Someone is teaching them manners and gratitude. Having manners and expressing gratitude are learned behaviors and ways of thinking. Such ways do not come naturally.

When I was 18 years old and wondering what in the world I was going to do in life I never dreamt in my wildest imaginations that at age 56 I would be folding 22 t-shirts each week for 22 little kindergarten students. Appreciative students, I might add. I just never dreamed it. Who could imagine such a thing in life? It is an honor.

The book **The Practice of the Presence of God** was written centuries ago by a monk who job in the monastery was to wash the dishes. He felt the job was beneath him. He wanted a more important task in the community. He finally came to realize, while washing dishes one day, that he could practice the Presence of God while doing dishes.

A few years ago in Boston, the Johnson family moved away. Moving away happens weekly in the military. Norman, Wendy, and daughter Laci moved to Washington D.C. Months later they flew back to Boston and visited all of us in church. Good to see them.

Laci was so excited to see her friends, including Daniel. They were about 10 years old at the time. Daniel first got her attention in life by doing stunts on his bike in front of her house two years earlier. The Johnsons had flown onto the base in a small Moonie aircraft owned and flown by Norman. They had planned to spend all day Sunday with us. But bad weather was approaching and Norman and Wendy made the decision to leave early in order to fly out ahead of the storm. Norman had to be at work Monday in the Pentagon.

Laci was so upset for having to leave her friends. She cried and cried and finally asked her mother why they ever had to move in the first place and leave friends. Wendy's answer was, "Laci, this is what we do in life. We move around as a military family."

I have always loved Wendy's simple answer. This is what we do in life. We fold t-shirts. We teach school. We serve in the military. We work in the library. We move around. We clean floors. We pay taxes. We go to church. We run for political office. We judge legal cases. We do Sunday School. We do woodwork. We play piano weekly at nursing homes.

Lots of response from Quin's business trip airport story from last week's sermon. Quin was in the terminal at the airport and asked an airline attendant where the gate to Cleveland was. She told him, "Sir, you are IN Cleveland."

Sometimes we already are in the place we are trying to get to. We just need to recognize we are already there. I love the power and simplicity of that story also.

Laci, this is what we do in life. Sir, you are in Cleveland. Church, this is what we do in life. We serve each other. We fold t-shirts for kids. We eat Bread and discuss weekly how to Love and Forgive. This is what we do. Oh, and we are already in the Kingdom that we are looking for. Go look in Pam's room if you want to see the Kingdom.

Oh, and the military did not teach me to fold t-shirts. My mom did. When I was in very young. Sort of impacted my life. I made \$270 a month while in basic military training and pulled in another \$20 folding t-shirts for guys who could not fold. Little things change your life. I upped my income nearly 10% by folding t-shirts and socks.

I have to keep talking until I get finish folding each of these 22 bright yellow t-shirts. Yellow is Mrs. Smith's favorite color. She dreams of having a bright yellow Volkswagon Bug convertible someday to drive back and forth to school, like the one she had in high

school. Except newer with a/c. It takes 14 minutes to fold these t-shirts. 21 minutes to wash, 59 minutes to dry, 11 minutes (30 seconds each) to fold. 91 minutes each week. There, I am done. One less thing to do this coming week in the Kingdom. Amen.