

Pam's Alarming Last Camping Trip
(Stephanie's First Camping Trip)

Christ the Redeemer Church
April 25, 2010
4th Sunday of Easter

Acts 9:36-43
Rev Gary L. Smith
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Several of us brave campers were sitting around the campfire Friday night out at Canyon Lake. It was 11 pm, the moon was out, stars were bright, clear skies, little wind, lake was calm and beautiful. We were laughing at the ones who got scared of the weather report and canceled coming to camp with us. We were the brave ones.

Then Steve Jones opened up his Blackberry hand computer and turned on the Weather Channel. He said, "We are about to get hit in an hour or so." The weather west of us looked like a red and green Christmas tree on his little Weather Channel screen. Green is bad and red is real bad. And it was heading east straight toward us.

Daniel texted me from home, "Do you know you are in a tornado watch area?"

Dorcas died and was remembered for "always doing good deeds and kind acts and giving to the poor." What a way to be remembered. Doing good and helping the poor.

We all just try to do right and do some good in life. We really do. Some days things just do not work out well.

I told Stephanie this night was going to be a night she would remember 20 years from now. This was her first camping trip and she was scared of the storm.

After a somber mood spread around the campfire out of concern for the storm we now could not avoid and the laughing stopped, we all decided to take cover in our cars to get ready to get hammered by the storm.

I threw enough large pieces of firewood on the fire to hopefully still have some hot coals after the storm hammered us.

Pam and I got in our car and were getting settled in for the night. It was quiet in the campground with everyone settled down for the night and the quiet before the storm filled the air.

Then our car's theft alarm went off. The campground was packed full and everyone was already down for the night. We could not get the car alarm to quit. It was louder than ever as I knew we were waking everyone up. Things got hectic quickly in all the blaring.

Randy threw a bag of tools at me and suggested I disconnect the battery. Pam took the bag. Our car is six years old and the battery on the remote key was dead and it would not

turn off the alarm.

Our alarm set off the alarm in the truck next to us. Things were getting louder and louder. Outside the car and inside the car.

Finally I did something that caused the alarm to quit blaring. I opened the door and the alarm started blaring again. Lights in tents and campers began to come on throughout the camp. I really wished I was home. Pam had decided to come to camp at the last minute since she thought it was not going to storm. She wished she was home.

Finally I told her we need to drive the Honda Pilot out of the camp. Slowly. So with our interior lights on and her talking away at me and the lights flashing and the alarm waking up campsite after campsite, I drove through the entire campground...from our very back spot.

Pam asked me what I thought people were thinking. I told her I hoped they would just think it was a tornado siren going off. That would take the heat off of us! Janice said all of our church members just laughed watching us drive through camp at midnight (now) with alarm blaring, flashers going, and lights on inside so everyone could see Pam expressing herself to me.

Janice called Pam on the phone and said, "Steve says to tell Gary to lick the remote key and it should fix the problem." I glared at Pam and said, "Pam, it is Steve. It is a Pig story. He is trying to get me to lick a key just as a joke." Janice said everyone was laughing because it was happening to us and not to them. It could happen to anyone but tonight was Pam and Gary's night.

At the front gate, Pam got so excited and said, "We ARE going home, aren't we?" I said "No. I have a truck at camp and I have to cook waffles tomorrow morning." The front gate was locked so we could not get back in past the spikes in the exit gate if we left.

So we "rebooted" our car alarm system at the gate as if it were a computer. We both got out of the car, locked it manually, unlocked it manually, locked it again, unlocked it again, and the alarm finally went off. Then the storm hit.

6 am Saturday morning I met a stranger in the camp rest room. He commented about what a storm we survived last night and then said, "And that guy whose car alarm went off was worse than the storm." I said, "Yeah, that idiot drove me crazy with that alarm." He nodded in agreement. I left it at that.

41 showed up from our church on Saturday night to eat a wonderful brisket dinner cooked by Randy. And to eat an apple cobbler and berry cobbler baked in a Dutch oven over hot coals by Don. The kids enjoyed flying a kite, swimming, boat rides in Don's boat and Glynn's boat, fishing, hunting snipes, eating, playing games on the beach, sunbathing, some women went to an Art Festival, Mark made homemade brew and root beer

floats...making great memories.

Pam and many others went home to their own beds Saturday night. About 15 of us stayed for a peaceful, after the storm night.

I was in my single person cot/tent (from Cabela's!) by the fire. All I was thinking about is that in only four days we get to see Amity and her boyfriend Will in Tennessee. And that I get to see my mom and my brother Dave in Tennessee also....we are all meeting in Knoxville to attend Shawn Kitchin's retirement ceremony being held Friday on the University of Tennessee Baseball Field. I will be officiating the retirement ceremony at noon on Friday and then I will be throwing out the ceremonial first pitch at 5 pm on the same field for the NCAA Men's Baseball game between University of Tennessee and some other team.

Life is so short. You never get to spend enough time with the people you really love in life. You never get to spend enough time with good friends doing fun things in life like camping. There is never enough time to spend time making memories with people you so enjoy being around in life.

You have things on your mind this morning. I am just counting the minutes until I get to see my daughter in Tennessee. That is where my mind is right now. I went to sleep Saturday night in my tent thinking about the upcoming trip to see Amity in Tennessee.

Then at 3 am Sunday morning an alarm in a car went off, blaring in the quiet night and waking me up. I grabbed my truck keys and pushed the alarm button to disarm the alarm.

It was not my truck alarm. It was someone else's alarm. I did not mind the alarm as long as it was not mine. I laughed as I could imagine someone else trying to shut down a cranky and loud alarm. Life spreads problems around for all of us to have plenty.

Our fire Friday night danced right through the storm. Our fire was the only fire in camp that survived the storm with flames dancing through the storm. We have to build up our spiritual fire within our lives in order to be able to withstand the storms we face in the coming week.

When 41 of us circled for prayer Saturday night, I asked if this was anyone's FIRST camping trip. A tired and sunburned Stephanie raised her hand high. We clapped for her. Then Pam said, "Ask if this is anyone's LAST camping trip?" Everyone roared. She says every camping trip is her last one.

If I am this eager to see my daughter in Tennessee this Thursday, think about how eager God is to see you each Sunday morning here at the Family Reunion called Communion.

Amen.

(Quin Dennis set off his car alarm intentionally after church with his remote key! It was so funny.)