

Settin' Up Tables with Pinky

Christ the Redeemer Church
July 26, 2009
8th Sunday after Pentecost/VBS Sunday

John 6:1-14
Rev Gary L. Smith
www.christredeemerchurch.com

Wednesday night before our Vacation Bible School Final Planning meeting, a couple of us were setting up chairs and tables. It was going to be a planning meeting but when we announced that dinner was being served there was a surge in interest. Which is good. Folks came. I like to work a little and visit a lot. I put one table up and then turned to see who was walking through the door.

In came Cheryl and her young son Brandon. Brandon has had a long summer and he was clutching and protecting his toys and not smiling much. We all have long summers during some seasons of our lives, don't we? At work, in our marriage, in parenting, in church. Sometimes life just takes the smile from your face. We clutch what remains from a threatening world.

I tried to help get a smile back on his face. He just clutched his toys and protected himself and his toys from me.

I wanted to try and bring a smile back on his face. I wanted to feed his soul. I wanted to connect with him but could not.

When I was at the Youth Academy of Christian Formation recently, word got around somehow that I liked baseball stories. I heard three baseball stories that gave me huge smiles. The first couple days I wondered if and how I might connect and fit in with those at the Academy. We all connect in different ways with different people.

One young minister there told me of his Texas bishop who cancelled the Monday evening worship service at the Annual Conference. The bishop then invited everyone at the conference to attend a major league baseball game being played in town that Monday night. The bishop threw out the ceremonial first pitch. Where can I sign up to be so lucky to have a worship cancelled in order to gather at a ball park? I would become a Methodist if every bishop had such vision and ability to surprise. I am still smiling at this bishop's courage and sense of play.

A professor from Austin Presbyterian Seminary lectured at our Youth Academy and noticed I was wearing a Boston Red Sox cap. I told him about the Pigeon Crap story that the youth enjoyed and understood in the Storytelling class. The story and cap is about good coming out of bad in life.

He told me that when he filled out a questionnaire for Austin Seminary when he was applying there for a faculty position that one question was "What would you like to do with your life if you were not teaching at seminary?" His answer was that he would love

to be playing second base for the Boston Red Sox.

He told me he attended Asbury Seminary in Kentucky and that one year he and some seminary classmates took a three-week bicycling trip...they peddled from Kentucky to Boston and back just to see a Boston Red Sox game. My kind of theology.

Another professor from Perkins Divinity School at Southern Methodist University spoke at our Youth Academy. After his presentation, he and I visited at length outside the chapel. He is the coordinator for the Chapel Schedule at SMU's chapel. Last year when he was putting together the annual schedule for review and approval by SMU superiors, he listed the normal Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter dates. In jest, he listed a Worship Service for the Blessing of the Major League Baseball Season...the week of Opening Day, first week in April. As a joke.

That surprised so many people that it created quite a discussion. Soon the discussions led to a serious decision...to allow him to hold the Opening Day Blessing. The thinking was that if it is worth doing in life then it is worthy of Blessing. I was smiling so much my face hurt as I listened to this story. He said it is not about baseball. It is about relationships and memories. He is now hosting a two-day workshop on the Theology of Baseball at Perkins and SMU within the next year. It is about relationship building.

I just wanted to get a smile on Brandon's face. But he just clutched his toys protectively. Life can be hard. He and his mother are sticking together through it all.

Later I heard him giggle. I turned around to see what was causing him to giggle. Steve Jones Pinky, all 6 foot 4 inches of him, the guy that wore the ridiculous Easter Bunny suit a few months ago, was showing Brandon how to carry and set up a table. He was feeding Brandon by including Brandon in the work. Brandon had a place. A job. A purpose. A new friend. A tall friend who took the time to allow Brandon to work in the church and have some fun while doing it. Brandon was giggling and having a great time.

One youth from the Youth Academy emailed me this week and said, "Mr. Gary, thank you so much for sharing. It's tough being home, but your email (stories about the Academy) gave me a reminder that we are still all very connected, and that this connection isn't going away. Goodness, I love you!! I can't thank you enough for this."

Brandon smiled, giggled, and ran to get another table with his new friend.

Jesus fed five thousand with just a little bread and a few fish. So can we with simple acts.

She is right. Our connection isn't going away. This is eternal. I look forward to tonight's Vacation Bible School...where souls are fed, kids smile, and we make connections that do not go away. There is hope in a world where a bishop cancels worship and tells everyone to meet at the ballpark...to watch the bishop throw out the first pitch. That

bishop understands the power of God, of love, of laughter, of fun that connects. A Connection that does not go away, as one Youth Academy student put it so well. Amen.