

Surprised on Good Friday

Christ the Redeemer Church
April 4, 2010
Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34-43
Rev Gary L. Smith
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I needed to get out of town on Thursday. I played on April Fool's joke on the entire church and, as one dear lady friend wrote me and said, "Gary, if this **is** an April Fool's joke you are NOT going to be liked anymore!"

I wrote y'all late on Wednesday evening March 31 and told you that Larry and Shirley Weston had decided to move back to San Marcos from Tennessee. We all miss Larry and Shirley so much and this was my way of saying Happy Birthday to Larry. April 1 is Larry's birthday. I thought y'all would catch that Larry was arriving back in town on his birthday April 1st. You missed that clue. Then I made it more obvious by telling you the reason he and Shirley had suddenly decided to move back to San Marcos was that their dog Holli had contracted a case of CAMA (Canine Appalachia Mountain Allergies).

One person responded, "Nice try Reverend - you had me going for a minute, but no self-respecting pooch from Sevierville would contract "Appalachian" anything! It would definitely have been "Smokey Mountain " something. Are people ever going to be p----(erturbed) at you for this one! Mike

So I decided to leave town Thursday to get away from a church family unhappy with me. Pam and I went to her parent's farm to spend a Good Friday away from church.

I left town to get away from church. And ended up in church.

Rev Brad greeted me prior to the 7 pm service at the Mexia United Methodist Church. Same sanctuary and church we have worshipped in many times since 1974 when Pam first brought me back to Texas to meet her grandparents and to sit in her Texas church.

I told Rev Brad that I had come to Mexia to get away from church. He smiled and said it must be nice to be able to relax in church and to not have to do anything. I said, "Yeah, but I came here to get away from church and here I am IN church." He just nodded.

In the book of Acts Peter is quoted as saying, "In every country God accepts anyone who worships him and does what is right."

Worship God and do what is right.

First Baptist in Mexia puts on two huge musicals each year that many people from other churches attend. Singing angels, theater, choirs...huge productions at Christmas and Easter at the First Baptist Church. One United Methodist lady in Mexia told her circle of church friends that she was not going to attend the annual First Baptist larger-than-life

Easter musical this year because “it is the same story every year.”

Her Methodist church friends looked at her and said, “Well, YEAH. Duh. It IS the same story year after year!”

Rev Brad said a group of ministers gather at Southern Methodist University for continuing Education courses. One minister recently asked his colleagues what he should say to a family who just lost their teenage daughter in a car wreck. Rev Brad told him, “Tell the parents that God cries with them because God lost a son also.” There is nothing more you can say, other than God cries with you this morning.

Rev Brad ended the Good Friday service by standing up to give the benediction. He wore a black suit, white shirt, black tie. Preacher funeral attire. He said that he and the choir director, also in black suit and white shirt and black tie, grabbed a quick bite at the Subway shop in small Mexia prior to the 7 pm Good Friday service.

Someone saw the preacher and choir director in black suits, white shirts, and black ties and said, “Guess someone died, huh? Guess you going to a funeral, huh?” Brad shrugged, looked at him, thought about it, and said, “Yep. Someone died.”

I really did not want to be there Friday night. I went out of obligation. To family. To Rev Brad. To God. Surprised on Good Friday, I was. There out of obligation and God surprised me.

I laughed so hard inside at Rev Brad’s story about him just shrugging his shoulders and not bother to explaining who had died. Yep, someone died.

Many of us have had parts of ourselves die in the past. Someone inside of you died. Dreams shattered. Relationships broken. Potential squandered. Jobs lost. Hopes dashed. Crushed by life on our own Good Friday. We understand the Good Friday part of the Easter Story.

I told Rev Brad after the service that if I lived near his church I would be in his church. He said, “I would be in your church.”

I complimented a man after the service for his reading from a Jewish translation of the Bible. He and his wife gave me their Jewish Bible, insisting that I take it. Across the parking lot I told him “Hey, I like your shirt also.” He laughed.

I am going to call him up this week and tell him I loved his SUV car also. Maybe he will give me his car also. They said they will come and visit Christ the Redeemer Church.

A woman recently visited our church. She told me there were lots of things about God and church she has a hard time understanding and believing. I told her not to worry about what she does not understand and to ignore what she does not believe. Focus on what you

do understand and believe. I told her to find a good group of people in a good church who are doing right and enjoy them. Don't worry about the parts you do not understand. Enjoy the parts that make sense to you. Find a church where they laugh, eat well, and are growing into their Faith. The Welcomeness. The laughter. The food. The love. The safety. The children. Good. Focus on what you understand and forget about the parts you do not understand. God accepts anyone who does right.

She said she had never heard it said like that. I told her I had never said it like that until she asked. I told her to find a safe church where people seem kind and where they eat well, where questions are allowed, and where they laugh a lot – worship there and then she will grow *into* her Faith.

Peter said, “Worship God and do right.”

No one was more surprised to hear that Larry was moving back to San Marcos than Larry.

Thanks for letting me back in town this morning.

He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Amen.