

The Last Supper at Texas Road House

Christ the Redeemer Church
February 21, 2010
First Sunday in Lent/**Time in a Desert Alone**

Luke 4:1-13
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Advent. Ash Wednesday. Lent. None of those are words or Seasons that I knew growing up. I only knew Christmas and Easter. Two days that had presents included. I have grown to like the Advent, Ash Wednesday, Lent, Good Friday days also. No presents but it all ties together well. Advent is getting ready for the birth of Christ. Lent is preparing to focus on his Life, Death, and Resurrection. I finally found my Ashes this week. I put them in a sacred place. With my special Baseball memorabilia collection. Sacred.

May you hear the Good News this morning in this Ash Wednesday Story.

Curtis was facing his Wednesday morning surgery and he was not looking forward to that time in his desert. He was fearful he would not survive the surgery. I began to play along with his fears. I told him if he was not going to survive his knee replacement surgery then he needed to take care of a few things. Sometimes to laugh is to keep from crying.

One, I told him to make sure he paid up his offerings to the church bookkeeper Lisa. We need the support.

Two, I told him he needs to pay me the steak dinner he owes me before he expires. He owes me a steak from the Super Bowl. I, as did any smart minister, took the SAINTS. What minister would not take the SAINTS? I wanted to collect my steak while he was still around to collect from. I told him so on Fat Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday.

Four of us met at Texas Road House for dinner at 6 pm on Fat Tuesday. He said he would pay for my steak dinner to pay off what he owed me from the Super Bowl loss. But he would not pay for Daniel's and Nora's dinner. I told him I would pay for their dinner. He was glad they came once he found out I would pay for their dinner. I wanted them to witness how to deal with fears in life.

I ordered a nice filet mignon dinner. It was so good. A cute college girl named Brea was our waitress. She asked after dinner if we needed anything else.

I pointed to Curtis and told her that this was his Last Supper. I told her that I was a minister in the church that Curtis attended. I told her that Curtis did not think he was going to make it through his surgery the next day and so this was his Last Supper. I told her that I thought, as his minister, that the restaurant should give him his meal free since it was his last meal. Curtis chuckled.

She just stared at me, looked at Curtis, and said, "I need to go get the manager for this one." I guess this request of mine was not in a training manual.

Daniel turned to Nora and said, "See what I have had to live with for 20 years."

The manager came. Valerie. She was in her late 20s and was also cute and Curtis liked the attention. She said, "What is this about some Last Supper, dying, and a free meal?"

I told her the same story. That I was a minister, that Curtis was facing surgery the next day and that he did not think he was going to make it, and that I wanted her to give him his meal free since it was his Last Supper.

She said, "You are a minister?" I said I was. She said, "Well then, where is your FAITH? You should have FAITH that he will make it."

Daniel loved it and said that he loves it when someone gets one over on his dad.

I said to her, "Look at him. Look how old he is. He thinks he may not make it. Give him his dinner free and make him feel better."

She looked at Curtis and said, "If I give you a huge hot brownie dessert with hot fudge and ice cream for free, will that make you feel better?" Curtis said it would. I said, "If it has four spoons with it then we will all feel better."

We got a huge complimentary Last Dessert with four spoons. It was so good. Actually we were charged for the dessert and then the dessert line item was marked "Redeemed."

On Ash Wednesday morning in the new hospital in Kyle, I asked Curtis in front of the staff in the pre-op room if he wanted a hand-made wooden pocket cross made by Don. Curtis said, "I would like a new one. My old one has a part that broke off. I would like a new cross." His cross was broken. It has been a long year for him. Sometimes our cross can not longer bear the load and it breaks. He took the new cross from me and we all had prayer. The staff wanted crosses.

Curtis was holding his new cross tightly with both hands as he drifted off to sleep in the pre-op room and as they rolled him to surgery.

Sometimes all we have to hold on to in life is our cross. At times we have to face life and our fears alone and have only a cross to cling to in desperation.

When the staff brought Curtis to his room hours later after surgery, most of them had dirty foreheads. Ashes in the shape of a cross on their forehead. The new hospital chaplain in the new hospital had a quick Ash Wednesday service in the chapel.

The first thing Curtis asked when he woke up from surgery was, "Where is my cross?"

Air Force Colonel Phil Garrant from Florida wrote me this week and told me that he and

his wife Heather had given up each other in their marriage for these six weeks of Lent. Wow. That is a serious commitment to Lenten sacrifices. He said that is more difficult to give up than my Mountain Dew and Chocolate Lenten sacrifices over the years. Then he signed the letter and told me in a post script that he was on temporary duty in Virginia until after Easter so he and his wife are separated until after Easter. Then he added, "Please keep this as non-attribution and tell no one."

I immediately emailed it to several people. Shawn wrote back and said, "Gary, did you not catch the **non-attribution** part?" Phil's wife Heather then wrote and said that was the fun part of being in Gary's world...you know you will end up in a sermon. She said "Gary is selective. He does not just throw *anyone* under the bus, you know."

We live because God has given us life and given us the ability to endure our crosses. We are selected to live. By God. Sometimes we can only hang on to our cross in life.

I visited Curtis this morning here in town in the Rehabilitation Center. I handed him this sermon and a copy of this morning's bulletin. He thanked me for communion and then he stuffed his little piece of bread into the little hospital communion cup...which was supposed to be used to drink *from* during communion. I then pointed out to him that Lisa Dennis's mailing address is in our bulletin. She is our church bookkeeper. I told him it is very important for him to continue to mail his church offering to Lisa even while he is in rehabilitation for the next two months. He just looked at me and groaned and laughed. Some moments of ministry are fun for me.

I stopped by Texas Road House after that this morning and met the managing partner, Mike Clegg. He loved the story about the Last Supper and free desert on Fat Tuesday. I asked him if he would provide free desserts to every family in our church if you brought him your church bulletin. He said, "Sure, tell them to come today." I said, "No, I mean free desserts throughout the entire six weeks of Lent if we bring you our bulletins with your name and sermon title as proof." He grinned and said, "Sure."

I wrote his name on the back of each of your bulletins today. Go enjoy a dessert of your choice, compliments of Mike Clegg. Oh, just leave your bulletin on your chair and I will clean them all up after church.

Steve will mark your forehead with ashes this morning here at the altar. A belated Ash Wednesday. Been a long week for some and a short week for others.

This is the Gospel. Amen.