

The Watermelon Truck and the Old Blue Trash Can
“Because He Lives”

Christ the Redeemer Church
June 20, 2010
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost/Father’s Day

Luke 8:26-39
Rev Gary L. Smith
www.christredeemerchurch.com

We all have demons inside us. Each one of us. Why, oh why. God, do you give me a lectionary reading about DEMONS on Father’s Day AND on my 35th Anniversary Sunday? Why God? 35 years tomorrow. Long week.

We all have demons from our past within us. This story about Jesus casting the demons into the pigs and the pigs going over the cliff makes more sense to me the older I get.

Jesus looked over the cliff and said, “Ah, Deviled Ham.”

We did not want to tow a trailer to camp Glorieta two weeks ago but we needed to haul the luggage of the 20 campers somehow. So Mark and Don do what they have done all of their lives in the journey of Faith...they built something to fix the problem. They built wooden side racks for Daniel’s long-bed Silverado pick-up.

Anyway, wooden sideboards. Jerry asked me, “How much are the watermelons?”

Daniel took off work, gave up income, and went to Glorieta, driving the watermelon truck and hauling luggage and being a camp counselor for the boys. Made me real proud.

We had walkie-talkies on our trip in each vehicle. His handle was Watermelon. My handle is the same as it has been since a week-long Youth Mission trip to the Appalachia Mountains back in 1983. Dr. Tom and Nadine Barker drove their brand new Mercedes as counselors to help me haul 20 youth and a van and a trailer loaded with lumber and tools to work on a house in eastern Kentucky. They drove their new Mercedes up into those mountains where folks had no running water or plumbing in the house and they worked with me for a week in the poverty and the need. We had CB radios in each church van and Mercedes. Tom gave me the handle of “Good Shepherd.” I used that handle throughout my entire 20 years as a chaplain.

Good Shepherd. Janice and Brenda were “Pair of Queens.” Janice was “Jasper.”

I came home exhausted from the trip. I told Pinky during our 5 am Monday morning daily Spiritual Training talk that if you really study the Scriptures closely you will find that Jesus spent the majority of his time trying to get *away* from people.

It is draining to give your emotional energy to others. It is draining to be a parent, a teacher, a pianist, a pastor, a counselor, a professor, and to live for and give to others. It takes much energy to identify and cast out demons in others. It takes much energy to turn

some pigs into deviled ham and to push the demons over the cliffs of people's lives. You have to get away to recharge. I could not even unpack my suitcase this week. I pulled clean clothes out of it this week. I was too tired to unpack. Too tired to talk. Ask Pam.

Classic Stephen Jones told me my hair turned greyer on the trip. It did. I lost pounds also.

Every day this week Pam drove her car to Travis School, parked it, and car-pooled with four other San Marcos teachers to Austin for a class on dyslexia that they were selected to attend. Mandatory fun. Pam has been telling me for months that she needs a new cell phone and I keep telling her where the store is located and what day of the month she needs to go there. Billing dates impact pro-rated contract changes.

Thursday was our date to change contracts so I suggested she have the car-pool driver drop her off at a restaurant here in town, I would have her dinner ordered and waiting at 6 pm, she could eat, then I would take her to the phone store before it closed at 7 and she could choose her new phone.

It all worked well until a car came recklessly speeding and squealing into the phone company parking lot, nearly hitting our car. All four doors flew open. I figured we were about to get robbed. Two drunken college boys and two drunken bikini-clad college girls piled out of the car. The two boys starting violently fighting.

The store manager locked the door and called 911...and handed the phone to me. He did not want to get involved. I talked the 911 dispatcher through a blow by blow, telling them if they did not get an officer to the scene quickly that someone was going to get hurt badly. About that time, Pam yelled, "He killed the other guy. He killed him." She thought one boy had strangled and broken the neck of the other. 911 asked if the guy on the ground was moving. I said he was motionless. The other guy then jumped into the car and sped off. I told the 911 dispatcher to make sure a police car intercepted that driver.

Guy on the ground had been strangled unconscious and then he got up. All the police arrived at our scene and none went after the drunk driver. No charges were filed by the beaten up boy...they were best friends from high school. Girls did not press charges. I asked if I could press charges for something. "No" was the answer. I asked if the police had caught the drunken boy driving home. "No" was the answer. I asked if the boy would be charged with drunk driving and disorderly conduct. "No" was the answer..."he is already home and his attorney would claim he started drinking after he got home and the courts would dismiss the charges." Two hours later we all went home...exhausted.

Friday morning I left home at 6 am to get out of town and away from people and to go play golf with Duane over in Bastrop. In the parking lot at 7:30 am, my phone rang. It was Pam. She was in tears. "I do not have a car, Gary. I can not get to work. We left my car at the school."

When she first saw that her car was missing from her garage, she thought the drunken

boys had followed us home and stolen her car.

We forgot to pick up her car Thursday night. I told you I was old and tired. I laughed and told her “Pam, we would have grounded our kids for a month had they told us they FORGOT to bring home their car.” I suggested, since I was in Bastrop, that she go next door and wake up our neighbors Amy and Big John and ask them to take her to work. Amy took her to work. The car pool girls were trying to figure out why Pam’s car was there at school but no Pam!

Friday night Bert Cobb sat down by Daniel at dinner where 16 of us from church had gathered for dinner prior to going to a comedy play in Lockhart. Bert shook Daniel’s hand and said, “Thank you for going to Glorieta and being a counselor for the youth in our church.” Daniel beamed at being thanked and said, “You are welcome. I enjoyed it.”

Saturday Pam went shopping and brought home a new black kitchen trash can. She said, “Gary, we have had this same blue trash can for 35 years and I am tired of it. It has moved all over the world with us. Here is our new black trash can.” (Here are both the blue and the new black plastic trash cans on the floor beside me.)

The blue one looked fine to me. Plus the black one looked too big to fit under the sink and under the plumbing. I only commented about how pretty the new black one looked.

20 minutes later Pam yelled out from the kitchen, “Gary, the new black can is too big. I have to leave the door open to get it to fit.” I said, “There is a reason why we have had the same trash can for 35 years. It fits under sinks in America and in Europe. All over.” She even had it sticking out the door and the door would not close. She said, “It does not look TOO bad with the door open.” I said that it would NOT work. 35 years. She is art and I am spatial in nature.

Daniel and I were throwing a football at Glorieta. He said, “Dad, isn’t this the first time we have ever thrown a football with each other?” It was. He is 20 and I am 57. We have always thrown baseballs. Life flies by. Moments are precious and brief.

Love moves the demons slowly out of our lives. Glynn Cooper told me Friday at the comedy play that the comedian there was funnier than me. I told him, “If I could say H-O-R-S-E-S-H-I-T from the pulpit like he does tonight to describe some weeks then I would be as funny as the comedian.” Some things this week has been pure H-O-R-S-E-S-H-I-T. He said he would come to church this morning just to see if I could fit that word into the sermon. There, I did. I am 57 and tired and old. Now I know why Jesus spent so much time trying to get away from people after kicking out demons from their lives.

It takes work to be a Church. Watermelon, it is an honor to be your dad. Good Shepherd, over and out. Oh, Daniel has a fresh watermelon in the back of his truck for each of you. And I have a very cheap, new black trashcan for sale for only \$6...we lost the receipt.

Join me in singing “Because He Lives...I can face tomorrow.” This song was sung by our church choir on June 21, 1975 at our wedding and we sing it every Sunday nearest June 21 in whatever church we are worshipping in that morning. Amen.