

A Wasted Cowboy and Dinner on the River Walk in 1976

Christ the Redeemer Church
September 20, 2009
Green Sunday/16th Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 9:30-37; James 3:13-18
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Bishop William Willimon says that worship is like a child playing in a sand box. It is not real but the play time and conversations are important. We dream and imagine while we play. Like playing in a sand box with friends, we do and say things that do shape us and our thinking. Worship is play. We play with the dreams and ideas we have about love, God, forgiveness, redemption, etc. All things we do not normally during the week, outside of the sandbox. We are child-like in worship just like a kid in a sandbox. We talk and dream about other worlds. We use words and language during worship we do not normally use during the week at work.

Johannes came to Texas for a month to fully experience Texas for the first time.

Jesus took up a child into his arms and looked at the religious people who stood around him and he tried to teach them a new way of living and thinking. He held the child and said, "Whoever accepts this child accepts me." At another time he said, "Unless you become like this child you can not enter the Kingdom of God's love."

We have to learn to think differently and to speak differently to know God's love.

Nora's and Daniel's friend Johannes had been up over 24 hours on Tuesday and Wednesday traveling to the United States from Germany. After driving hours to Frankfurt, flying 11 hours to Houston, going through Customs for 2 hours, driving 3 hours from Houston to San Marcos, he finally arrived at the San Marcos city softball fields by the third inning Wednesday night.

Our church co-ed softball coach Steve Wynne asked Johannes if he was ready to play. Johannes replied, "I am wasted." We all just stared at him, trying to figure out what he was trying to tell us. Daniel translated it all for Johannes and us.

To say "I am wasted" in America can mean one thing if you are college age. To say "I am wasted" in German simply means "I am exhausted." Johannes was just tired. Once the coach understood what Johannes meant with his words then the coach went ahead and put him into the game. One pitch, one hit. Two batters later Daniel got a hit and knocked in Johannes. He was off to a good start in his first visit to Texas!

New language, new game, new to town, new words, new experiences.

Friday night we took Johannes to eat dinner on the River Walk in San Antonio. I recalled later the first time I ate dinner on the River Walk in 1976.

Pam and I were newly weds and we were visiting with her family for the first time after we married. It was July, 100 degrees with 98% humidity, miserably hot and humid. We were dripping wet with sweat and walking along the River Walk. I was new to the family and learning minute by minute how to talk and relate in this new relationship.

I was quiet and just listened and tried to learn. I wanted to learn so I could stay married.

Pam and her father got into a discussion about where to eat. Pam wanted to eat inside in the air conditioning. Her father wanted to eat outside by the River. Pam said she could *see* the River fine from inside the restaurant, where there was air conditioning. Her father talked of how nice it would be to sit outside on a table under a tree *by* the River to get the full *experience* of the River. He wanted ambiance and she wanted air-conditioning.

I was watching a new way to discuss and decide upon matters. It was a gentle debate and I did not know yet who was going to get their way.

I just kept quiet.

Her father won. I was learning. I never heard a declaration of a settlement but we sat down outside by the River under a tree. I thought she was going to persuade him to sit inside but somehow we ended up under the tree. But we were outside, dripping wet with sweat. We were getting the full experience. Pam just ordered her meal quietly.

We ordered our meals, the full plates of Mexican food arrived, and we were ready to eat.

Before one bit was taken, a pigeon in the tree sitting directly over Pam's plate over our table fully covered and splattered Pam's plate full of Mexican food. Direct hit.

Pam got the full experience of sitting under a tree of pigeons by the River with a plate full of ruined food.

I kept quiet, wondering what would happen next. I was getting an education in how the family I had married into handled family discussions.

No one said a word. Everybody just got up and we moved to the inside where there was air conditioning and where we could see the River just fine. Inside, Pam's father said, "Pam, which table do you want?" Pam *then* got to pick the table.

It was a new way of discussing things and making decisions to me. I had to learn how to listen to Pam's quiet ways. That pigeon splattering her plate taught me that it is best to just listen to her from the beginning.

Relationships and learning about other cultures and learning how to love others is a matter often of working hard to learn words and codes and ways of each other. We all learn differently.

I love listening to Johannes, Nora, and Daniel work hard to learn the nuances of each other's culture and language. So it is with love. We are told that the best way to understand the Love of God is to become like a child and learn the words of each other gently.

I asked Lisa this past week if she was exhausted -- wasted -- from raising Cameron and getting him off to college. She said she was. She and Quin gave their all to raising Cameron. She had to protect him and demand that others, including teachers, see and respect his unique gifts when he was a very young child. Good parents protect their children and constantly have to explain the unique ways of their child to the world. It is exhausting work. You will be wasted at the end.

Pam loves to remind the parents of her kindergartners and other teachers that each child learns differently. We each have gifts and unique ways of learning. What others may consider or call a learning disability or weakness Pam calls a way of learning that has to be discovered. She sees each child very differently and uniquely as a gift of God's to the world. She is there in kindergarten to help *discover* the best way for each child to learn.

God never gives up on trying to help us and others to see our unique gifts and unique ways of learning. We are loved.

God has a unique way of seeing us and our world. Just keep quiet and come to this Table and see the world the way God sees you and your gifts. It is a new language and a new way of looking at things. We did not sit under a tree Friday night at the River Walk as we showed the Wasted New Cowboy the River Walk for his first time. We sat outside by the River but under a covered roof. It is safer and more peaceful that way. I learned that back in 1976. Amen.