

When the Jokes and Rumors Backfire

Christ the Redeemer Church
March 14, 2010
4th Sunday in Lent

Luke 15:1-3
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I debated about telling about a rumor I heard about in town concerning Pam and me. But then I thought, “Well, why should bad news and rumors win? Why not tell the funny parts of life also, the Good News parts, the Truth?” So here it is. I hope you hear the Good News today.

It has been a fairly typical week and year so far for a preacher in a small town. Some joys. Some deaths, including last week when we buried our friend Curtis. Big church. Not big in numbers. Big in heart. Big on truth. Big on inclusiveness. Big on God’s joy.

10-year-old Mark Jones donated a rock to the Church Silent Auction last week. I laughed at him and tried to warn him that no one would bid on it.

In January I attended, along with 800 other town people, a community-wide Memorial Service without Pam because she had another obligation that night. Last week a member of the town community recently approached a member of my congregation and asked “How long have Gary and Pam been divorced?” The lady in the community spreading this rumor went on to explain to my church member that I was with a black-haired lady at the funeral. When our church friend said, “Oh, Gary and Pam are very much together” the rumor-spreading lady said, “Oh, then I guess it was just his church secretary that he was with that night.” I don’t have a church secretary.

I loved my friend’s answer, “Oh, Pam and Gary are very much together. They are very much together.” Four times our friend said, “Gary and Pam are very much together.”

When Pam told this story to me she ended the story by asking me if I wanted her to dye her hair black. So funny. 34 years of marriage and there are still surprises each week. Laughable rumor.

Life and people are funny, aren’t we? *(During the telling of this story this morning, Steve Classic said, “What a good place to take a date. To a funeral. Lots of people and free food.” Quin said, “Gary, when did you and Pam get back together?” So funny.)*

Our entire church family is tired this 4th week of Lent. We buried our friend Curtis last week and it took a lot out of us at many levels. We also celebrated our 5th Anniversary on the same day. Then we had our first ever Camp Fundraiser Dinner and Silent Auction that night.

That is Lent. Tired souls. Exhausted spirits. Lost. Waiting for Hope. Waiting for Easter. Waiting for Spring.

We raised \$3,275 of our needed \$6800 to send 15 youth and counselors to Glorietta Christian Camp this summer. We expected to raise \$1,000 last Sunday night; we would have been surprised to raise \$1500. We were shocked that God blessed us with \$3,275.

Walking the path of God's ways is full of surprises, isn't it?

Lisa's mother had her mastectomy surgery this past Thursday. She worked right up until surgery time. She does not like to sit around idly. She calls such idle time "Stinky Thinky" times and says it is not good to have Stinky Thinky times. It is not good to sit around and fear. It is not good to sit around and regret. It is not good to use your tongue and mind for rumor creation and bad thoughts.

She and Lisa were speaking on the phone Friday night when we were with the Dennis family and Priscilla asked to speak with me. She thanked me for the prayers of our church and thanked me for the wooden cross she received from our church.

What a pleasant surprise conversation with Priscilla.

Margaret Jansen told in her book *A Nail in a Sure Place* of when she got her first speeding ticket in life at age 68. She appeared before the judge and cried and pleaded guilty but asked for grace. Said she was all excited about all of her family being in town for her 50th Wedding Anniversary. Told the judge she was taking her grandson to the beach and forgot about her speed.

Judge asked, "50 years married to the same man?" She said, "No, I changed him." Judge laughed. Her case was dismissed and she was directed by the judge to do some work in a juvenile court, which she did.

God loves us just the way we are but too much to let us stay this way. Lent. Jesus surprised folks when he said you should leave the 99 accounted for sheep to go out and find the one lost sheep. Risk 99 for 1? Bad business plan, you carpenter's son.

Love is full of surprises. God will risk it all to find us when we are lost. And we are all lost. Love is not interested in a good business plan; Love is interested in finding a Lost Loved One.

God wants to be very much together with you this morning. Very much together.

Last Sunday night there was a game going on during the Silent Auction that I did not pay attention to during the evening. There was a bucket filled with Animal Crackers and chocolates and the likes. Marked "The Gary Smith Special". I ignored this kid's item.

Bert Cobb won the basket and did not take it home with him. Stephanie Jacobs was so excited about the basket and asked, since no one took it home, if could she have it. Since

I knew it was Bert's then I did the nice thing and gave his basket to Stephanie. Joke was on Bert. Stephanie was so excited. I got Bert. Or thought I did. It backfired.

Turns out the joke was on me. Turns out that the Gary Smith Special, concocted deviously by Pam Jacobs, had hidden coupons in it. Whoever ended up with the basket would get a free dinner and free entertainment with the pastor...paid for by the pastor!

Turns out 8-year old Stephanie Jacobs has an evening of dinner and go-cart racing with the pastor coming...all paid for by the pastor. That would be me. Turns out such an evening with her grandpa is a family tradition in the Jacobs' family.

That is one reason we started this church...to be family to those like Stephanie whose extended family is far away.

Ed bid \$25 on Mark's Collectible Rock and won it. I then told Mark he should have donated 10 rocks for then we would have made \$250 from his rocks! Ed included Mark with his bid of \$25.

Every sheep, every bid, every child's dream of being included in the fun of Church Silent Auctions, and every moment is sacred in God's eyes. God is very much with us. Very much with us. Amen.