

12 Pentecost

Proper 14

12 August 2018

Ever build a Pole Barn?

I Kings 19: 4-8

Psalm 34: 1-8

Ephesians 4:25 – 5:2

John 6:35, 41-51

We bought our place because it had the essentials.

Horse barn, pasture for horses, house. We finally figured out though that a garage would be nice. So we built a garage using pole barn technology, if that would be the right word.

You figure out where you want the building, then level the ground. Then you dig some holes where you're going to put the "poles" – actually treated 4" x 4" timbers – then put the poles in and pour concrete around them to hold them in place. Then if you're going to have a concrete floor you pour the slab, smoothing it as it dries. Be careful if you do this in the fall to keep the leaves off the fresh slab. And then you add the framing, the roof trusses, metal for the roof and siding, the garage doors. And now you have a pole barn garage.

And we did. But we built it in the fall.

And leaves fell on the slab before it was completely dry.

And I guess that's what I really want to talk about – the leaves falling on the slab.

Now every time I go into the garage to get into my car I see them – the imprint of some of those leaves. And to tell you the truth I'm sort of glad those leaves got on the slab. Take one leaf – its outline, the veins, there is a remarkable beauty in a leaf – sort of like a fossil imprint.

Isn't it amazing that something as light and fragile as a leaf could make such an imprint on concrete?

Yet if we think about it, who we are, how we think, and what we believe are all shaped by the imprint of others on our lives. We are an accumulation of those touches – those leaves – that others have left on our lives.

More importantly, as followers of Christ, we leave the imprint of our own words, our own acts, our own deeds on those with whom we come into contact. There are very few people whom our lives touch who are so hardened that even the lightest touch from us will not leave some sort of imprint on their lives – good or bad.

And in a way I sort of think this was what Paul was getting at in our reading we heard earlier from Ephesians. How do we get along with our neighbors, how do we get along with those we sit with every Sunday morning in the pews, how do we get along with those we encounter in the business of ordinary living every day?

"...let all of us speak truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another...let no evil talk come out of [our] mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that [our] words may give grace to those who hear...put away...all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ

has forgiven [us]....be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us....'

We were up in Beebe early one Saturday morning maybe a couple of weeks ago. We had been at the Beebe Flea Market early that morning – that's a story in and of itself. On our way home we stopped in the local Wal-Mart to pick up a couple of items. That early in the morning there was only one check-out line with a live human being cashier. She only had one customer ahead of us. Great! That meant that in just a few minutes – no seconds – we would be on our way back home with our prize from the Beebe Flea Market. That, of course, was a genuine Cave City watermelon.

Have you ever had the expectation of making it quickly through the checkout line only to be sorely disappointed?

The one customer before us was a lady. She had only a few items to be checked, mostly vegetables and fruits in clear plastic bags.

Including we were to learn some mangoes. And as we were also to soon learn as her voice increased in decibels and volume English appeared to be a second language for her. And she was unhappy with the cashier about how she had been charged for the mangoes. The cashier, an older lady – I suspect she and I were not that far apart in years – made some sort of adjustment in the price.

That did not satisfy the customer whose voice kept getting louder.

The cashier kept saying that she was sorry but at this point it was beyond the adjustments that she was authorized to make and that the customer would need to go to Customer Service.

Some people do not like Wal-Mart including my daughter. I think she feels that a lot of businesses – small ones particularly – have been put out of business by Wal-Mart. One of my own concerns is the seeming trend to reduce the number of people working through the use of automated check outs. Wal-Mart is not the only retailer who is doing this, of course. I think it takes away jobs.

The lady with the mangoes finally left and we were able to quickly check out. On leaving I told the cashier that she had handled the situation with her previous customer with kindness.

And she had. She had to follow the rules set by her employer and where she could make an adjustment she had. And despite the customer's loud voice and unhappiness she had been courteous throughout. I don't think I could have done as well. And given her age I suspect that this job was important to her. Many times older people with fixed and limited incomes are having a rougher time getting by than we might think.

And as important as I suspect this job was to her I think her courtesy – really her kindness – was something deep within her. She certainly realized that her customer was not as familiar with the language and probably not even the customs. And I think she realized that the customer's exasperation was her own frustration in having to deal with language and customs that were not her own rather than

anything personal. And I think the cashier realized that she was making an imprint on other's lives even in the seemingly fleeting moment of checkout.

We are going through a rough patch in this country – maybe even in the church. We've had it so good for so long – and in the past when we have had challenges we've come together – all the different parts of the country, all the different races, all the different backgrounds, all the different opinions – we've come together. Would we do that now if there were a great challenge?

It's a dangerous world we live in. Our prosperity, our freedoms, our freedom even to attend church, are not guaranteed to us in perpetuity – indeed considering the history of humankind as long as there has been a recorded history such things are a rarity and the exception rather than the rule.

Maybe the greatest gift we as a Christian community we could give to the larger community – beyond our fundamental mission to share the Good News – would be to encourage and foster a spirit of friendship and tolerance – and love – of all people – even those with whom we disagree the strongest.

Sometimes when I have discussion with my good friend Jim Dalton along these lines he tells me that I see the glass half empty rather than half full.

So I would share one other experience with you.

The other evening we didn't want to take time to make something for supper.

While we live out in the sticks we are really not far from what I call "South Cabot." This is where Highway 5, Highway 321, all intersect Highway 67-167.

At that intersection are gas stations and banks and a McDonald's, a Sub-way and a Barbecue joint. My dentist even has his office there.

There is also a Burger King. Which is where we went to get something for supper. As luck would have several young people finishing up with baseball or soccer practice were stopping there as well for something to eat and were in line ahead of us. Another cashier, another line. The line was moving along ok when the youngster in front of me when told the cost of what he had ordered looked in his wallet and didn't have enough to cover it – and not by just a penny or two.

Some of you are probably saying, 'Well, did you pay it for him?' I could have and probably should have but before I could even think about it the young cashier there at Burger King, said 'I'll take care of it,' reached into his own wallet and pulled out paper money to pay the difference. This young man probably not making very much himself – probably just getting by – pulled out money from his own wallet and paid it himself.

Who created man? Are we just some random happenstance, just some creature who thinks he is smarter than all the other animals because he can form words that others sometimes can understand yet really is no more than an accident of atoms and molecules coming together?

Or are we created by a loving Creator who calls us in all sorts of ways to love each other?

My money is that the young cashier at Burger King knows.

Richard Robertson

My thanks to my good friend Fr. Jim Dalton from whom I have shamelessly borrowed some thoughts and words used in this message. More importantly, I thank him for being an imprint of Christ to so many including myself.

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