

DESSERT

Traditionally, dessert is the last course served. I have maintained that tradition here, despite the strong opinions given in this final story of this first potluck collection.

As a purveyor of Biblical and spiritual wisdom, Pastor Schmidt spent more than a modicum of time counseling people on a wide variety of subjects. While a small-town parish in a farming community often brought subjects uncommon to big city congregations, issues still surfaced that could be considered universal to humanity as a whole.

As he sat in his den contemplating his next sermon topic, he looked over at the shelves full of resource books. His pride and joy, so to speak, was *The Complete Works of Martin Luther*, a 55-volume set published jointly by Fortress Press and Concordia Publishing House. He had everything in print by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and some translations of Melancthon. He also had reference books on Spurgeon's sermons, *The Works of Jonathan*

Edwards, and a complete guide to Wesley's hymns. Many more such learned men of God provided him with centuries of study in the relationship between God and His Creation of mankind. Still, as formidable as this team of theologians was in providing counsel, occasionally situations arose that required the good pastor to draw on the wisdom of common sense or some other mundane source.

Pastor Schmidt, of late, seemed more fascinated with the human mind and its interaction with the spirit. He marveled at the complexity of the brain, and he marveled at those who insisted it came into being by some chance chemicals floating around in space. The last year found him absorbing numerous volumes on improving the memory, especially of the elderly. Last week he visited Alma and Rudolph Limpke at their farm in the valley. Getting on in years, Rudy had suffered a brain injury when he fell off his combine a while back. Things like that proved hard for Pastor Schmidt sometimes, especially when he had known Rudy's active philosophical wit so intimately. His time at their farm seemed to center on their life with

Rudy's condition. Rudy couldn't remember anything he had done in the last hour, or the last week, for that matter. Yet he could spend hours telling you every last detail of a farming story from thirty years ago.

Two days after visiting the Limpke's, Pastor Schmidt had a session with Doug Waters in his office at the church. A high school senior, Doug wanted some advice on choosing the career path in his life. The young man could fix anything that moved, and he had a compassionate heart for life. One visit to the Waters' farm and the "zoo", as his mother called it, revealed his natural abilities and his passion for animals. Doug would make a great veterinarian, but he struggled with a spiritual calling that he perceived to be the ministry. Pastor Schmidt had never seriously counseled anyone about taking the path that he himself had chosen, so there lurked a certain amount of anxiety in his words of counsel. He enjoyed talking with Doug, especially when the young man expressed himself in the way that only youth can. Pastor Schmidt gave him a brief review of the course of studies and what types of positions might be available. He

spent the larger portion of time talking about Doug and his aspirations. As their talk neared an end, a picture arose in Pastor Schmidt's mind of that vast collection of spiritual wisdom sitting on the shelves in his den. He could see Martin Luther counseling some student of theology so many years ago. He consciously searched the woods and fields of his mind for just the right words to send Doug on the right path for his life. Did his search find those words in the fertile minds of those who lined his bookshelf? No, those precious words came from a well-known personality who had not yet made a name in theological circles. And the words of counsel that Pastor Schmidt used to embolden the young man came from none other than Kermit the Frog, "You must look deep inside your heart and ask what you really want. If your immediate answer is 'dessert', you probably missed your heart and went directly to your stomach."

Doug Waters left Pastor Schmidt's office fully intending to enroll in a Pre-Seminary program. Pastor Schmidt knew he would make a fine emissary of the Lord.

What did concern Pastor Schmidt somewhat had to do with the last words of counsel he had given the future theologian. He finally reconciled his worry with the words and how his mind could have possibly submitted them to his mouth by recalling when the Lord sent out his twelve disciples.

In Matthew 10, it was written, “These twelve Jesus sent out, charging them, ... ‘When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you’.”

So, if the Lord wanted him to cite Kermit the Frog as spiritual encouragement, then it’s entirely possible that the Spirit of the Father put those words in his mouth. He would not question it any further.

The hour grew late, and Pastor Schmidt had let his mind wander back to events unrelated to what should have been his current focus, that of his sermon. He needed something to break the writing impasse with his sermon. As his eyes scanned all the volumes of wisdom on his shelf, he felt an

awkwardness in his thought. Then he stood up, walked into the bedroom, and kissed his wife, who was getting ready for a restful night of sleep. Apologizing for the late hour, he said he still had some work to do on his sermon.

Then he walked down the hall, opened the door to his daughter Heather's bedroom and looked in on her. Just before closing the door, his eye caught a glimpse of a book that his daughter had left open on her desk. His mind once again posed the question of how the Spirit of the Father communicates. It almost seemed too eerie, too coincidental. Yet, it called him, and he felt, in an open-minded sort of way, that he should at least give consideration to the possibility that it was the Holy Spirit offering him an option. He walked softly into the room, picked up the book, and carried it back to his den.

Pastor Schmidt unfolded the book to the pages that he had seen open. At the top of the left-hand page, he found a quote from the Great Gonzo, "That which doesn't kill us makes us stronger, even as it exponentially increases our health insurance premiums."

On the following page, the lead shepherd of St. John came across some recollections and observations of the main subject of the book, Kermit the Frog: “My parents urged every one of us to follow our dreams—or at least to go someplace else to play so they could finish their dinner in peace.”; “WOW is MOM spelled upside down. I noticed that, but then again, I spend a lot of hours sitting on logs waiting for fireflies to tire out so I can grab a light snack.”

Just below that, he read Kermit’s words about dessert that he used in counseling Doug Waters the week before. Pastor Schmidt began mulling over whether he should go in the door that appeared to open to him. Had anything happened recently that might add impetus to such a path?

His mind uncovered a fragment of an event that had involved the aspect of dessert. Last month the church had a potluck prior to the annual voter’s meeting. He remembered walking into the fellowship hall and seeing the ladies putting out all the dishes on the two long tables. As best as he could recall, he did his usual inspection of all the delicacies, paying particular attention to the desserts.

Sometimes he succumbed to the Opie Taylor theory regarding dessert, that being one of eating the apple pie first to make sure you don't get full from eating everything else and not have room for the pie. At the potluck in question, he saw James Tolbert standing very close to the food tables and, as soon as the prayer concluded, almost running to the dessert end and loading up. Of course, his strategy had become well-known and accepted. Being the youngest of eight boys in a farm family, he often got the short end of the stick when it came to dessert.

Still, the clergyman pondered whether any spiritual parallel existed regarding dessert, including the theory of eating it first. Plenty of dessert on the potluck tables carried a certain magnetism that attracted most everyone in the room, especially when everyone needed a pick-me-up. While there might have been ample leftovers from the dozen different mixtures of chicken casserole that inevitably populated a potluck, a crumb of leftover dessert rarely existed.

Just as he sometimes felt a little shame if he took too much dessert on the first pass, he felt

pangs of minor guilt regarding this entire line of thinking that some might think trivialized the powerful work of the Spirit. Yet he could not remember any scriptural evidence that showed the Spirit was incapable of working in any domain on this earth. So, he must think; he must try to open every neural doorway in his mind. Surely the Spirit would knock, and he would open. Of course, he grew tired with the late hour and all. Maybe he was just grasping at straws.

Then he heard a knock. He spoke loudly and fervently, “Yes, come in, Lord.” But it was only his wife seeing if he knew what time he’d be coming to bed. He assured her it would be shortly. He fell asleep in his chair in the den while a thunderstorm brewed outside. At some point the power went out and when it came back on, the bright fluorescent lights in his den gave a sudden unique radiance to the room. Whether it was a pure coincidence or not, at the moment the lights shone brightly, he awoke with an idea.

What was the sweetest spiritual gift given to humankind? The gift of Grace, of course. New Testament scripture abounded in good news, like the

good news that plenty of dessert graced the potluck table. Sometimes the Old Testament could be likened to broccoli, you know; it's good and necessary for the health of the spirit, but if you don't always eat the broccoli like you should, the New Testament still gave you, through Christ, the dessert of eternal life with God. And if he worked in the Opie Taylor dessert theory with something like a spiritual equivalent of always consuming God's word first and then, if you aren't yet full, having the secular food of life. Yes, he could build a sermon around that. Yes, he could.

After he completed the first page of his sermon, he pulled out the church calendar he always carried in his briefcase. When he looked at the upcoming month, he felt disappointed. It would not do; he must find something. He looked at the scenic calendar on the wall and found satisfaction. The 29th showed that day as a Bank Holiday in the United Kingdom. He pulled out his memo pad and jotted down a note to have Jane Walter, the church secretary, schedule a potluck at church in honor of all the brothers and sisters in the United Kingdom. She should make a personal telephone call to

Rebecca Caldwell so she would be aware of it with plenty of advance notice. She was always good for at least three pies. Then he made a second note to himself as a reminder to pick up a copy of *Before You Leap: A Frog's-Eye View of Life's Greatest Lessons* for the bookshelf in his den, just in case. You never know when or how the Holy Spirit will speak to you.