

PUZZLED

Looking out his office window, Pastor Fred Anderson saw the postal worker carrying a thin square package up to the front door of the church. A few minutes later, Doris Haupt, the church secretary, knocked on his office door.

“Come in,” said Pastor Anderson.

“Here’s a package addressed to you personally, Pastor,” said Doris.

“Thanks, Doris. I could see him bringing it up and I wondered what it could be ... By the way, I should be here all afternoon in case anyone needs anything.”

“Okay, Pastor.”

Checking out the return address, he did a double take. The return label read: John Smith, 555 Main Street, Anytown, USA. How odd, he thought. Could it be some kind of joke? Then he noticed another label at the bottom of the box that read: To be opened by addressee only. Unauthorized opening punishable by statutory law. He shook his head, having seen those kinds of labels before. They

almost always offered some deal that couldn't be beat, and only he had a personal reservation for a seat at the table. He thought about opening it later when he went through all the junk mail, but it was so lame that he couldn't help but open it immediately.

Taking out his trusty pocketknife, he cut the seal at the top of the box. He pulled out something about two-foot square, wrapped in tissue paper. When he removed the tissue paper, he saw a large object shaped like a puzzle piece. One side had a straight edge while the other three sides had the typical puzzle cuts and projections. Pastor Anderson felt the texture of the piece and found it fascinating. The piece had another straight vertical line down the middle, dividing it in half. The left side, which had the straight edge, had a grainy granite-like feel and had 'St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Profitville' written on it. The right side had a woody-like texture and had no writing on it.

Emptying the box completely, Pastor Anderson also found a note that said: "Bring this puzzle piece to First Baptist Church in Profitville at 10:00 AM on Saturday June 12th."

Pastor Anderson always liked a good puzzle, and this appeared to fit that billing. Since it was one piece of an obviously larger picture, he deduced that others in the area might have received a piece as well. He called his friend, Pastor Schmidt in Cedar Crossing.

“St. John’s Lutheran Church, this is Marjorie. How can I help you?”

“Hi, Marjorie. This is Pastor Anderson. Would Pastor Schmidt be in?”

“No, I’m sorry. He won’t be back until about 3 o’clock. Could I take a message for you?”

“Sure. Just tell him I called and for him to call me back as soon as he can.”

“Okay, Pastor.”

“By the way, let me ask you a question. Did Pastor Schmidt receive a package in the mail today?”

“Yes, he did, but he wasn’t here, so I’ve got it on my desk awaiting his return.”

“Is it thin and about two-foot square?”

“Yes, and what’s kind of funny is the return address. It says: John Smith, 555 Main Street, Anytown, USA.”

“Okay, Marjorie, tell him to call me after he’s opened it.”

“I sure will.”

Pastor Anderson decided to call Bud Morgan, the pastor at First Baptist Church. Since the note said to bring the puzzle piece there, maybe he knew what was going on.

“First Baptist Church, Bud Morgan speaking.”

“Bud, this is Fred Anderson at St. Peter’s Lutheran. How are you today?”

“Good. Let me guess. You got a package that had a puzzle piece in it with instructions to bring your piece here on Saturday, June 12th.”

“Ah ... I guess that means you’ve talked to a few others already.”

“I’ll tell you what I told them. I don’t have a clue why someone would say to bring them here. None of it has originated from First Baptist. And, yes, I got a piece, too. Mine is the same size as

everybody else's. It has a straight edge on the bottom and a horizontal line down the middle dividing it in half. The top half is brown and the bottom half is kind of a mottled gray with 'First Baptist Church, Profitville' printed on it."

"Are you going to be there and have the church open on Saturday?"

"I think I have to."

"Well, I guess I will see you on Saturday, Bud."

"I'll have coffee and donuts, if nothing else."

"I like a man who has his priorities straight."

About twenty minutes later, Pastor Schmidt returned his call.

"Hi, Arnie. Did you open your package?"

"Yes, I did. What's this all about?"

"I don't have any idea, Arnie. I called Bud Morgan at First Baptist and he said he doesn't know anything about it either."

"A little mystery, then."

"Yes, and it would be my guess that every church in the county got one."

“Are you going to take your piece down?”

“Of course. You know I couldn’t resist a mystery like this. I just hope it’s not some marketing scheme to sell us something.”

“That would be a disappointment.”

“Am I going to see you there?”

“Absolutely, Fred.”

“Well, I’ll see you then. By the way, Bud Morgan said he would have coffee and donuts.”

“Well, every good Lutheran must take advantage of that, especially when a Baptist is buying.”

When Pastor Anderson arrived at First Baptist on Saturday, there were already about twenty cars there. Everyone seemed to be standing outside waiting for some direction when Bud Morgan came out of the church and said he had the Sunday School room cleared of chairs so we would have an open floor. Everyone then filed into the Sunday School room where they found a table set with trays of donuts and five pots of coffee. When the clock read ten-thirty, some murmuring began to occur.

“Gentlemen, I don’t know what to tell you,” announced Bud. “Whoever sent these puzzle pieces apparently is not here and not knowing who it is we don’t know who to call.”

“Why don’t we lay out the pieces on the floor,” suggested Pastor Anderson.

“Yeah, we may as well,” said Father John Treadwell from St. Ann’s Catholic in Maryville.

The guys who had corner pieces put theirs down first to give the others some type of bearing. After about twenty others had gotten their pieces placed, it became fairly obvious that the brown, wood textured part of the puzzles formed a wooden cross. The gray pieces with the church names on them looked like a border of rocks around the cross. There were two no-shows, but they could readily see the picture anyway.

“What does it mean?” asked Bud Morgan. “Not what does the cross mean, obviously, but why was it given to us like this?”

No one voiced an immediate opinion, limiting their conversation to just those around them. Finally, one spoke up.

“Gentlemen, I’ve been studying this closely,” said Pastor Fred Anderson. “Those of you that know me know of my affinity for puzzles, especially mathematical ones. I don’t see any strong mathematical overtones to this, except maybe one. There are thirty-four leaders here representing most of the churches in our county. Each one of us received one puzzle piece and yet, it took thirty-four of us to come together to get the complete picture. Individually, we would never have seen it.”

“So, you’re saying it is sending us a message that we can’t fully understand what Christ wants us to do unless we do it together?” asked Father Treadwell.

“No, I don’t necessarily mean that,” said Pastor Anderson. “Everybody here understands what Christ wants us to do. Most of the people we see in the pews every Sunday understand that. I think it speaks more to all the people in the world out there who outwardly show no signs of understanding it or maybe suffer from some degree of myopia. Notice how the church names on the rocky texture side of the puzzle piece are kind of hard to read when you stand at a distance, but then look at how powerfully the cross stands out.”

“And the massive rock border that forms when we put the pieces together denotes a solid foundation,” said Rev. John Glaser from St. Mary’s Episcopalian.

“Right,” said Pastor Anderson.

“So, we should all unite and become Lutherans then, Fred?” asked Father Treadwell with a sly grin.

“Right,” answered Pastor Anderson. “No, of course not. We’ve got 400 or 500 years of denomination dogma that would never allow that. Besides, look at the puzzle. Each individual piece is still an individual piece with the individual church name on it. If the puzzle meant that all the pieces were to become one church, it would have all the same name on them ... St. Peter’s Lutheran Church ... Each puzzle piece can continue to teach and minister within their own group in their own way as they see fit to interpret the less overt areas of scripture. The unbelieving world around them will have a hard time seeing the message of the cross because it is only a small section of a woody textured edge on the puzzle piece. Put all the pieces together and, again, the shape of the cross is huge

and quite visible, except to those who are completely blind.”

“A daunting task, considering all of our differences,” said Bud Morgan.

“Yeah, how could we do it?” posed Rev. Glaser. “Does anybody see the answer to that question in the puzzle?”

“I’m not sure I can see an answer to that in either the individual puzzle piece or the completed puzzle,” replied Father Treadwell. “What about you, Pastor Schmidt? You haven’t said much.”

“I was looking out my office window the other day, watching the power company install some new electrical lines along the highway. It was getting near noon, so they took their lunch break. Since they parked some of their trucks on the church property, I had to walk by them to take some mail out to the box. We exchanged pleasantries, and I became fascinated by all the tools and materials they had on the back of their trucks. They had one reel with very thick cable that had maybe a couple of dozen smaller diameter wires twisted together to form a solid conductor. The wires, though individual, carried the power as one. Now

some of you may wonder what this has to do with our puzzle, but I mention it because it is of the same concept as the puzzle. Just as the pieces of the puzzle are separate yet put together give a powerful image. The smaller individual wires were still fairly good size, and to twist them together would have probably taken some powerful machines. There is only one power I know of capable of twisting all the different denominations together ... the Holy Spirit.”

“I certainly agree that the Holy Spirit has the power to bring us together, but I’m still having a little trouble seeing anything in the puzzle to tell us how,” said Rev. Glaser.

“I don’t think it tells us the practical,” said Pastor Anderson. “I think if we can agree that the Holy Spirit has the power to pull it off, then we go home to our individual churches with the full confidence that we can do it. Keep an open mind and just start noting anything that you experience or that is going around in your neighborhood and then ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten you as to how, working together, we could solve it. Some examples could include supporting a pro-life center in the county, or a larger food bank, or education for

the home schooled, or financially supporting a member of the community in need of an operation or anything like that ... or maybe nothing like that. Every puzzle piece will have its own environment or situations that come up and, if more strength is needed, that church can bring it to the puzzle table. But I think the puzzle is also telling us that whatever we do, we make sure we do it so that the world can see the picture we bring with us.”

It got kind of quiet in the room, except for the low murmur of the gears of thought.

“Do you think it was the Holy Spirit that sent us the puzzle pieces?” asked Pastor Eric Thomas of Grace Bible Chapel.

“I don’t know,” answered Pastor Anderson. “I’m pretty sure it wasn’t John Smith, 555 Main Street, Anytown, USA. It could remain one of those mysterious ways in which He works. It may remain a puzzle forever.”

When no one else seemed to have anything else to add, Bud Morgan spoke up.

“Well, gentlemen, I suggest we go back to our homes and let this all soak in. Then maybe, if

we have been so moved, we get together later and lay out some type of organization.”

There was unanimous voice consent to his suggestion.

“I also think we should each take our puzzle piece back with us as a reminder of what we found here today and what it could represent for the future,” added Bud. “And for the practical aspect of doing that, it gives us back our Sunday School room floor. It looks like there are plenty of donuts left over if any wish to take some home.”

Pastor Anderson was not the least bit puzzled to understand that the first person back to the donut table was his friend, Pastor Arnold Schmidt.