

IT'S ALL ABOUT FREEDOM

Out at The Homestead, there's a large hill called Horse Sense Hill. Sometimes I'll ride up the hill with Clint when I want to sort out the craziness of the week. It's a great place to ponder the realities of the world around us and, occasionally, rekindle an appreciation for things often taken for granted. I wasn't able to go last week, but Clint shared his thoughts with me when he went on up with Jake, his horse.

Pastor Arnie Schmidt

As I ride old Jake up to Horse Sense Hill this morning, I'm aware of the fact that all I'm doing is holding the reins. Old Jake and I have been up this hill so many times lately it has just kind of become a natural part of our life. Jake leads me more than I direct him. The bridle and the bit are a restriction to his freedom, yet I think he accepts that little restriction as part of being where he is. If I turned him loose into the wild, I think he'd be back at the

paddock gate before dark. He's willing to give up a little of his freedom because he knows he's protected from the wolves and the storms back at the stable. Yeah, he has to work some carrying his old friend up the hill from time to time, but he reaps his wage in hay and oats. And I think he has come to a sense of self-worth in his work, for he often comes to the fence and stares at me if I don't come over to saddle up on that day.

I know, perhaps you are thinking I talk to my horse too much, or maybe I'm becoming a bit daffy in reading so much into our time together going up to Horse Sense Hill. You could be right. Watching the news today can make you want to talk to your horse on a different level. Sometimes it makes for a more sensible conversation.

When we get to the top of the hill, we have our routine. I dismount and let Jake stand free. He always neighs in protest if I get too close to the edge of the sharp drop off at the backside of the hill. His horse sense tells him that if you get too close to that slope, you could fall off. Perhaps he's just worried about where his next meal will come from if I do something stupid.

As I sit down atop Thinking Rock, as good a name as can be for a place that's a rock and where a lot of thinking takes place, I wonder where we should draw the line in giving up our freedom in this land called the United States of America. Every time we give a little more authority to the government for some aspect of our lives, we are giving up a little more of our freedom. Common sense should tell us that neither can we be totally free nor totally controlled. Government has to have some authority to maintain law and order and to protect us from those who would seek to dominate or kill us, whether foreign or domestic.

Mark Twain once said, "Laws control the lesser man ... right conduct controls the greater one." Judging from the number of laws that Congress passes every year, we must be rapidly becoming a nation of lesser men. Or at least in the eyes of those who govern over us. Heard a number the other day of over 75,000 pages in IRS rules and regulations alone. Since the money we make often represents a measure of our time and the effort we make to live our lives as we choose, then surely a sense of logic or horse-thinking should tell us something is wrong; that perhaps we have crossed

the line of freedom if it requires that much law for our government to just collect our taxes.

Laws are the bridle and bit restricting our freedom, directing us where to go, telling us what we have to do, and holding us back. Without them, anarchy and enslavement to the dark side of our human nature reign. With too many of them, we have stagnation, apathy, and enslavement to the elite who think they know better than we do about how we should live our lives. Somewhere in between is that line of freedom. Sadly, I am beginning to feel like the mass of America is numb to where that line is.

Let's face it, there are very few people around today who have actually had to fight for freedom. Except for those who have been in the military "family" that has suffered death or injury from the undeclared wars fought in the last 60 years, I don't think most of the current generation has any feeling for the price of freedom. The wisdom, or lack of it, in all those military engagements hasn't impacted most Americans' concept of our individual freedom. There are so many who seem to be adrift in the no man's land of feeling entitled to what

freedom has produced with no knowledge of how freedom has produced it.

How many more unread 2,000-page laws will the legislature pass before America's freedom slips beyond the grasp of us common folks out here? I don't know. When you see what our children are being taught, or not taught, about freedom, it begins to look like Miller's swamp down the road. The swamp does support life for a few, but it is not a place of prosperity.

And what about God? The USA has become such a melting pot of nationalities, cultures, religions, and non-belief that sometimes it's hard to know where to draw the line of religious freedom. If God created man with a free will, which I believe He did, then there is a very definite parallel relationship between man's spiritual freedom and his secular, governmental freedom. It's almost humorous that Jesus could say in seven words, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" what it takes our lawmakers hundreds of millions of words to say.

I reckon I kind of lean toward the government just staying out of religion all together. I know that can be kind of a muddy stream sometimes, cause

less face it, there are some folks out there who use religion as a veil for all kinds of evil things. Unfortunately, the government has to wade into the stream sometimes when a group that purports to be in the business of saving souls, in reality just wants to suck your soul under the water. And when the stream is muddy, you can't always see the massive sinkhole that the government has created in wading into the water. I reckon that "separation of church and state" can be a good thing properly applied. Nowadays, though, it's no longer just part of a speech that one of our founding fathers gave; it's given precedent as law.

I reckon the stream will become crystal clear in God's due time. Until then, I just wish those folks in government that represent the will of the people would think about coming up here to Horse Sense Hill before they write more laws to protect us from ourselves. I don't think you'd find anyone in these parts that would want the government to tell you what religious beliefs you must have, but if you were to come up and sit next to them on Thinking Rock, I believe you would have a hard time convincing them that banning the free expression of your belief in God in the public arena, as if

doing so is the equivalent of poisoning the creek, makes any kind of sense.

Well, I can hear my wife ringing the dinner bell way up here on Horse Sense Hill, so I best head on back down. What can we do? For now, I guess we'll just have to sit a little taller in the saddle, speak our piece when we need to, talk to God more than we usually do, and ride on. I can only hope that should I begin to lose the mental capacity to exercise that good old "horse sense", that Jake will still be around with his "horse sense" to keep me from getting too close to the back edge of the hill.