

MEMORIES

Sitting at the long wooden table, working on my second (or maybe third) piece of pie, I watch the potluck crowd begin to disperse. Ladies find their dishes to take them home. I only have to look at their facial expressions to tell which dish is completely empty and which dish is hardly touched. If there are husbands nearby, I can look at their facial expressions to know if they're going to be eating warmups tomorrow.

Tonight, for some reason, as I watch them say their goodbyes, I wish they didn't yet have to go. My mind wants to cling to the presence of the people who are such a big part of my life.

There's little Adam Walker, ten years in this world now. I remember the time I was in the park, and I saw Adam, then about five, and his dad. A typical autumn day followed an early morning rain, complete with mud puddles all around. His dad waved, and I waved back. I was just close enough that I could hear them talking.

Lowering his paper, Bert Walker said, “Adam, stay near and whatever you do, keep away from the mud puddles.”

“Okay, Daddy,” answered Adam.

Bert raised his paper and continued reading (the Cedar Crossing Gazette can be riveting sometimes). Adam walked about with typical young boy curiosity.

“Hi, Mr. Squirrel ... Hi, Miss Butterfly ... Boy, you sure are working hard today, Mr. Ant ... You sure are bright today, Mr. Sun.”

With his hands in his pockets and trying to whistle, he continued to stroll around. Then he began to talk to himself, “It sure is a pretty day and I really like visiting with my friends.”

Seeing something interesting a short distance away, he walked over to get a closer look. When he reached it, he looked down. With a mischievous grin, he looked around to make sure his father wasn't looking. He took off his jacket and carefully laid it aside. Then he joyfully began playing in the mud puddle.

“Are you behaving, Adam?” asked his father.

With a furrowed brow and worried look, Adam answered, “Yes, Daddy. I’m okay.” Then he looked at his muddy hands and got a panicked expression on his face. He wiped them on his shirt so they would be clean, but then he realized that his shirt was now dirty.

Although I couldn’t hear exactly what he said, I guessed it was something like, “Boy, oh, boy. What am I going to do now?”. Then he decided he better put his jacket back on to cover his shirt.

“Come on, Adam,” said his father. “It’s time to go.”

“Okay, Daddy,” said Adam.

I remember crafting a sermon from that scene. Only I changed the ending to complete the message. When Adam realized that his shirt was now dirty, he frantically looked around for some way out of his predicament. His eye caught something hanging on a wooden post a short distance away. There he saw a clean shirt draped over the cross piece of the post. He took off his dirty shirt and exchanged it for the clean one on the post. As

he walked away, he turned and stared back at the dirty shirt hanging on the post.

“And did you stay clean, Adam?” asked his father.

“Yes, I’m clean,” answered Adam.

“So you are, son,” said his father.

Helping her mother with the dishes, Jenny Armbruster had returned to the spiritually transforming ambiance of the potluck. She just graduated from college and couldn’t help but come back for one last meal before heading overseas for a job assignment. She never said that exactly, but I inferred it. How else would you explain it?

I remember watching her grow up, always the little lady. I often wondered about those who left the parish to continue their education away from home or took a job in another state. As an extension of that concern, I fixed up a little packet of things that I hoped would help her continue her walk with the Lord while at college. I called Pastor Bortz of the campus church and gave him a heads up.

We exchanged several letters over the years, so I got to see the progression of maturity and wisdom. Though she often talked of the hostility that some showed towards Christianity, she never felt they tested her faith beyond what it could handle.

Now, she's all grown up and attending what may be her last potluck for some time. It's a melancholy thought.

Buster Washington and his wife are walking out the door. Trailing behind are their two strapping young sons. Yes, I can see Coach Martin recruiting them for the football team next year. Buster and Abby were the first couple that I married who were both members of St. John, so that was kind of a treat. Hardworking farm folks, they have been faithful in attendance and generous with their offerings when the Lord has blessed them with a bountiful harvest. Despite that image, Buster has a somewhat wry sense of humor and is not above a practical joke now and then. I have to be on my guard when I visit their farm, because he seems to enjoy playing those practical jokes on me.

But, of course, Abby is always there to apologize with a peace offering of some tasty dessert. Abby is well known for her pecan pie at potlucks.

Sitting down at the other end of the table, Bert Metcalfe always issues me a challenge to see who can eat the most pie. He's eighty-four years old, wiry of frame, and philosophical of mind with perhaps a modicum of stubbornness. I always let him win, but I don't let him know that I'm letting him win. He always relishes the victory and probably doesn't let me know that he knows that I let him win.

The last time I saw Bert at the Chit Chat Café, he indicated a need for some lively conversation. While I usually agree with Bert on principle, I will sometimes take a contrary view just to let him exercise his mind. That particular day he lamented about the current generation and their apparent moral decline. While I tried to remind him that past generations weren't always so righteous either, he countered my point with facts. As Mark Twain once said, "A single fact will often spoil an interesting argument." In general, we of the current generation and the future generations could do well by listening to those who have traveled before us.

So, here I sit talking as if there will be no more potlucks, as if the memories of past potlucks have to hold me for the rest of my life. It is but a momentary lapse in fundamental faith and theology. As long as there is life, the potluck will survive. Perhaps the foods will change, though maybe not so much in this little farm community. Do not fear, my friends, more potluck dishes will grace the tables of St. John as time continues its march to eternity.