

DOGVILLE II

With his pickup truck down for some repairs, Pastor Schmidt took his car out for a visit with a new family that had visited church last Sunday. He only had a moment to talk to them after the service, so he called them and arranged for the visit. The family had just purchased the old farm of Nellie Peterson, who finally had to move to a nursing home. Nellie owned and lived on the farm for 94 years, but her children had all moved away, and they had no interest in the farm. Pastor Schmidt figured if the new family could get Nellie's approval, then they must be alright.

As he drove down the driveway, he noted a new sign that read 'Dogville II'. Undoubtedly, they had a sense of humor, but the name did intrigue Pastor Schmidt. The car made that unmistakable sound of tires on a pea rock surface as he approached the home. Jason and Barbara Hewitt stood on the front porch waiting for Pastor Schmidt.

"Good morning, Pastor," said Jason. "Did you have any trouble finding us?"

“No. When I heard that you had bought Nel-
lie’s farm, I knew right where you were ... Good
morning, Jason and Barbara.”

“Good morning, Pastor,” replied Barbara.
“Come on into the house.”

“I have to ask,” said Pastor Schmidt. “Dog-
ville II?”

“As opposed to Dogville I?” asked Jason.

“Either one,” answered Pastor Schmidt.

“Have you ever heard of ‘Puppy Gospel’?”
asked Barbara.

“Puppy Gospel ... um, that sounds so famil-
iar ... Oh, yeah, that’s from the family that raised
guide and aid dogs. They named all their puppies
after religious figures ... Wait, don’t tell me, you
are ‘Puppy Gospel’.”

“Guilty as charged,” said Jason. “Dogville II
is our new home now, where Dogville I was the
original place that we just kind of outgrew.”

Trotting into the living room with the tail
bashing everything remotely close to its path, a
Golden Retriever promptly greeted Pastor
Schmidt.

“Pastor Schmidt, meet Martin Luther,” said Jason.

Pastor Schmidt put his hand down and Martin Luther quickly put his paw into it.

“Well, it’s certainly good to meet you. I must confess, though, that you don’t look anything like what I expected.”

Not too far behind came a female Golden Retriever with the same friendly greeting as Martin Luther.

“Mother Teresa,” said Barbara. “These two pretty much get the run of the house.”

“Tell me, Pastor,” said James. “Are you offended by us naming dogs after religious figures?”

“I’m not, because I understand the reason, Jason. I’ve read about your work, and I commend it. I’m sorry I didn’t make the connection at first. I imagine, though, that you have probably taken some flak.”

“That we have, Pastor,” said Jason. “When we first decided to do it, I wasn’t sure what to expect. With the response we’ve received, I don’t regret it at all, despite some who object. I have found

it to be the best icebreaker I've ever experienced. People are always asking us about the names, and that is always an opening to talk about the Gospel. That's how we eventually came up with 'Puppy Gospel'. The combination of providing the dogs for assistance, people's appreciation for what the dogs can do for them, and the ability to explain what we do and why we name the dogs as we do, has been a unique and rewarding mission."

"How many dogs do you have?" asked Pastor Schmidt.

"Right now, we have, besides these two members of the family, eight that we're training, two Golden Retrievers and six Labradors."

"That reminds me of something my wife and I saw at a big mall upstate," said Pastor Schmidt. "We were sitting on a bench when we saw this family with aid dogs walking the mall. There were three dogs, one older one and two young puppy trainees. The older dog was being handled by the young daughter, and the two trainees were leading mom and dad. When the family stopped to talk to some people, the older dog, the veteran, as we called him, calmly laid down at the girl's feet. The

two young trainees literally collapsed onto the floor with panting tongues and heaving sides. The veteran knew how to pace himself, and the others hadn't yet mastered that. We just thought it was one of those funny camera moments.”

“Yeah, we've seen a lot of that over the years,” said Barbara. “It has been interesting and fun to watch the development and different personalities of the dogs.”

After an hour of conversation, Pastor Schmidt said goodbye to the Hewitts, thanked them for allowing him to visit, and said he hoped to see them on Sunday.

Two days later, Pastor Schmidt had three emergencies come up with his flock. He had not slept in seventy-two hours, and eventually he crashed for a nap on the couch at home. At some point during his deep sleep, he had the following mishmash of spiritually dubious thoughts:

The town of Dog Haven was governed, of course, by dogs. Dogs also pastored the churches of Dog Haven. A German Shepherd led the

Lutheran Church; an English Sheepdog the Episcopalians; a St. Bernard the Catholics, and so on.

Pastor Schmidt found himself sitting in a town council meeting being held in a saloon named 'The Doghouse'. The town council voted unanimously to increase the line in the budget for fire hydrants.

Cats, of course, could not vote in Dog Haven, which did not sit well with the felines. They were planning a protest rally in the alley behind Tom's Fish Sales. It simply wasn't fair that the council always passed laws favoring dogs. In addition, since cats could only hold jobs in the sanitation department, they planned a garbage strike. They came up with the slogan, 'Let them clean up after themselves'.

The council also approved a statute that would speed up the permit process for bone vendors in the city. They also imposed a supplemental tax on kitty litter. The cats appointed Pastor Fred Anderson as their spokesperson. The Chamber of Commerce elected Pastor Schmidt as Dog Haven Visitor of the Year, and they suggested he contribute to the council's pizza fund.

When Pastor Schmidt woke up from his nap, he felt relieved to have survived his visit to Dog Haven.

What my thoughts about Dog Haven have to do with anything, I don't know, but they just seemed appropriate to add to the story. Despite the mention of various dog breeds as leaders of the various denominations, I've yet to find any spiritual significance to it. Perhaps what we can glean from the real 'Dogville II' is that we can be a messenger of the Gospel in whatever we do in life.

Pastor Arnold Schmidt