

Shaky Hands, But a Good Haircut

Every Father/Son Campout holds its own unique memories. Now that the youngest of our four and only unmarried child will be a junior at Baylor next year, I realize more than ever our times in the childhood bonding moments are soon to run out. It is not that I am regretting this, because the memories of our married children and grandchildren are becoming precious. With all the excitement of the extended family, I find myself nostalgically holding on to remaining time as just being Dad - no prefixes, no suffixes.

Sean and I have some never-to-be forgotten memories. The outstanding thing that our men remembered about the Popes at campouts in the past, was that I was always looking for my "prone to wander" son. Men still laugh as they imitate me traipsing through the woods hollering, "Sean! Sean!" For the most recent campout Sean arrived into Houston, tired from his schooling and new job. Shortly after he arrived, we headed out to the deep country. Joe Allen had thoughtfully already put up our tent. We fellowshipped around the campfire and soon we were back in the tent. I think the weather this year was the best we have ever had for campout - cool at night, and warm in the day. My baby boy was soon asleep and I lay there reminiscing of days gone by with two boys beneath the stars, the sound of the frogs, the crickets, and an occasional owl or far-off coyote. The next morning when we awoke, the temperature was still cool and the boy and I took a walk by the lake, found a peaceful spot and had devotions and just talked about anything that came to mind. When we returned to the campfires of the group we discovered the great smells of breakfast, so we indulged in the generosity of others as we sampled some of the best campout cooking in America.

The morning eclipsed into afternoon and I began to feel the pressure of Sunday sermons bearing down on my mind. We got into the car and drove back toward Houston. We went the out-of-the-way journey home and passed through two little towns that time had forgotten. I saw the unmistakable barber pole in one of these little towns and knowing I didn't have time to get to my barber, I decided to take one more venture in the rustic, old time country town experience. This little town reminded me so much of the town in which my dad grew up, Big Sandy, near Hawkins where he is buried, just outside Tyler.

As Sean and I walked into the barbershop, I saw two chairs, but only one barber. He was extremely old. I noticed his age had affected his motor skills to some degree. The quivering hands did not frighten me. Due to the chosen few hairs on my head, the extent of damage that could be done was going to be limited. The afternoon was slow, no one else came into the shop, so the old gentleman talked...and talked. He was a veteran of World War II, the husband of one wife, now with the Lord, and the father of seven sons. As I inquired I discovered he had accepted the Lord as his personal Savior. He and his wife worked hard on keeping the boys in church as they were youngsters growing up. But then in the rather animated conversation, a deep pathos seemed to swallow him up, as he talked first of the boys that are good Christians and then of the ones who did not turn out right. I encouraged him not to give up on those boys. He smiled as I got out of the chair, thanked me and then looked at Sean and with quivering hands said, "How about it, Sean, can I give you a haircut today?" Sean seemed to look at those hands and then pushed his young, steady hands through his thick hair and said, "No, Sir, that's alright; I'm fine!" Then I couldn't resist; I said, "Go ahead, Sean, he'll take care of you. We'll take the time." The old barber chimed in, "Come on, Sean. Why don't you let me take care of that hair for you." Sean nervously asserted, "I'm fine, really; I want to wait." I told the barber good-bye and on the way out, I said, "Sean, he would have taken care of you!" Sean sheepishly smiled and said, "That's what scares me, Dad!" I put my arm around him and we both had a good laugh.

We took a wrong turn and went about ten miles out of the way, enjoying one of the prettiest Texas springs I remember. The azure blue sky, the deep green grass, and the beautiful wildflowers provided a nice setting for a father and son to recall in coming years. The stars overhead, the cool, gentle breeze, and conversation as we talked into the night and finally to sleep will be remembered as well. And so will

the melancholy barber who had everything the American dream could give you, except the assurance that all was well with all his family. Jesus said, *“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”* (Matthew 16:26). If I may paraphrase this great verse I would also say, *“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own family?”* On that Saturday, Sean and I saw something beyond the shaking hands. Someday and probably within the next few years, those hands will be still in death. We saw the broken heart of a father longing for the whole family to be within the fold of God and in His will. As I look back, that was a good rendezvous with the old barber. My son looked deep into the hurting eyes of a man who really wanted nothing more in life than to leave it with the assurance that all his boys are spiritually out of harm’s way.

We are four weeks away from Father’s Day. Let me remind all children of any age, no matter how old your dad is, see what we saw just a few weekends ago. See the broken heart of an old dad. See the broken heart of your dad if your life is not fully surrendered to the Lord. Through the years of youth work, I have heard the statement repeated, *“Why don’t you leave me alone? If I get into trouble, I’ll pay for it. Leave me alone because after all, I’m the only one that gets hurt!”* Oh, no, my dear friend, you are far from the only one that hurts. In some ways I am sure it hurts the parent worse than it does you. Many a parent wonders where they have failed when kids don’t turn out right. I know it is often not the parent’s fault. Even God says, *“The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son”* (Ezekiel 18:20). Even though this verse speaks the truth of God, many parents still accuse themselves. The party-going child doesn’t hear the sob of a weeping mother or the lonely moan of a dad. One morning in spring, my son saw the antithesis of where we want to be twenty years from now, if the Lord spares us life. It was a good day for a haircut. It was a good day for a valuable look at life, just beyond a pair of shaking hands. *“And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd”* (John 10:16).

- Pastor Pope -

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