

The Fifth Saturday Meeting

When I think of Old-Fashioned Sunday, much comes to mind. Immediately I think of the “Fifth Saturday Meeting” that happened in my youth four times a year. All the churches that were like faith would come together for an all day affair. Mom and the other ladies of our church would pack up their “fixings” and Dad would round up the kids and we headed out to the agreed upon place, which was usually in a rural country church in Central Florida. In our area of the country, the windows of the non-air-conditioned churches stayed open for every service, closed only for rain. Those days bring back sounds, sights and smells never to be forgotten. I see the archetypical church, wood framed with a quaint steeple, a tall ceiling with ceiling fans, the baptistry with varied paintings such as a stream coming down from a mountain, Jesus being baptized by John the Baptist or a hill with an old rugged cross as the centerpiece. When you got baptized in one of those old churches, you entered a story. I see the pulpit, an antique of the rarest kind, where the message from God by God’s messenger was preached. I see the pews which were made of slat boards. Those seats were designed for worship not for comfort, however if you lay your head in mother’s soft lap, there was a measure of comfort provided. During the morning service, specially assigned people prepared the food. Iced tea was made in thirty-gallon trash cans (dedicated to the sole purpose of tea). The smell of that traditional drink being made in the outdoors gave me a love for this southern specialty called sweet tea. Served at most Fifth Saturday Meetings was chicken purloo, a thick stew made of rice, chicken and small game -- an old tradition in the southern United States. The smell of that dish cooking in the great iron pots wafting through the open windows was almost more than a hungry boy could handle. However, when dinnertime came, it just made the eating of this delicacy even more enjoyable. Speaking of eating, when you came to the end of the row of tables with entrées and vegetables there was always a great long table or two of nothing but desserts such as peach cobbler, apple pie, banana pudding, cakes of every kind and sometimes homemade ice cream. Why, there was not a country club in the world that could compare to that display and array of food!

How appropriate that we should have dinner on the grounds at the beginning of our Thanksgiving week, for our faith and culture is so much a central part of our reason for giving thanks to the Lord. How I thank the Lord for our Savior, His cross, His life, His Church, and the country we have been reared up in. That old Fifth Saturday Meeting brings back to mind values that, I pray, we as God’s people will never get over. Allow me to use that meeting to make some points:

1. We sang our hearts out.

People who could not read a note of music were able to pick out harmony parts and the sound was akin to what you thought Heaven may sound like: high voices, low voices and in-between voices bringing praise to our God! And the

songs we sang placed a message in our hearts that we have never forgotten such as, “How tedious and tasteless the hours when Jesus I no longer see; Sweet prospects, sweet birds and sweet flowers, have all lost their sweetness to me; the midsummer sun shines but dim, the fields strive in vain to look gay. But when I am happy in Him, December’s as pleasant as May.”

Music prepares the heart for worship: “*Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing*” (Psalm 100:2). The Bible illustrates that the teaching of the Bible goes hand-in-hand with singing: “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord*” (Colossians 3:16).

2. The preachers preached.

There was a mystery that surrounded the pulpit. This is the place where the preacher preached and woe be to the man that dared enter that space that did not haul off and preach like the building was on fire and the Devil was coming through the back window! Abraham Lincoln said, “I like to see a preacher preach who looks like he is fighting off a swarm of bees!”

May God help us to never forget the primacy of preaching. The Word of God says, “*For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe*” (I Corinthians 1:21).

I remember seeing some of those old time preachers who would take off their coats and sweat through their clothes, speaking at the top of their voices. I was impressed that these men had something to say and we’d better listen. Preaching was never looked at as optional -- it was paramount.

4. We gave generously.

When it was time for the offering, the plea was often for a special mission project that we could all have a part in. Even as a youngster, the words of Jesus were never questioned, “*I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive*” (Acts 20:35).

5. Families worshiped together.

How blessed it was to sit together as a family, singing the same songs, hearing the same sermon and often responding the same way. God was important and the family was important and when these two were together in a church service, lives were changed and a spiritual bond was formed even stronger than physical bonding. “*I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD*” (Psalm 122:1).

6. The Church was our extended family.

There was something about the atmosphere of that day that reminded me that this was the place you made your friends and the place you would find your future mate. When we were kids attending public school, we took our notes from home saying that we needed to be excused from dancing, based upon our

religious conviction. I remember feeling so isolated, oftentimes being the only kid sitting on the bleachers while the other kids danced. When we were at the Fifth Saturday Meeting, we were surrounded by other kids who had the same standards and, by the way, we still had fun. The Bible says, *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?”* (II Corinthians 6:14).

7. It was a taste of eternity.

Those Fifth Saturday meetings lasted all day. We would sing, the preacher preached, we sang some more, another preacher would preach. We ate, then came back into the service and sang and yet another preacher would preach, until night fell and then we would go back home and prepare for the Lord’s Day that took place the next day. By the end of the weekend, we had a taste of eternity. As a kid, you thought those services would never end! On the positive side, we were in no hurry; nothing was more important than loving, serving and worshipping our Lord. The clock was not obeyed, but God was. Time was precious and we were giving it all to God on those Fifth Saturday weekends. *“The eternal God is thy refuge...”* (Deuteronomy 33:27a). *“For thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones”* (Isaiah 57:15).

-Pastor Pope-