

17 August 2018

“Haunting Stories”

My friend and a person who has preached for me in several of my churches in the past, Tom Butts, pastor *emeritus* in Monroeville, AL has written a thought-provoking article. This story is for people like us who need to be reminded that what we do as a faith community is so important. Our common life on behalf of others is why God keeps us in business. Please consider Dr. Butts' words:

It has been said that we never get over what happens to us at home. That can be good or bad. One of my friends told me a story I've never been able to forget. There was a little boy in Shreveport, LA, who was causing all kinds of problems at the First United Methodist Church. He lived in one of the run-down neighborhoods nearby. He was always getting into cars in the parking lot or managing to slip into the church late at night. But no one could catch him, although they had a pretty good idea who he was.

One evening Dr. D. L. Dykes, senior minister at the time, happened to be walking in one of the darkened halls. This little boy came scampering around the corner just at that moment and ran right into Dr. Dykes' arms. He tried and tried to wriggle loose, but Dr. Dykes held onto him tightly and wouldn't let him go. Finally, the boy gave up. He was only 8 years old, and he had no clothes on except an old pair of faded jeans—no shirt, no shoes, no socks.

Dr. Dykes decided to take the boy back to his home—not to the police station, not to the juvenile authorities, but back to the child's home a block or two away. When they pulled up in front of the house the boy's father was sitting in a rocking chair on the front porch. When he saw D. L. and his son walking up to the house he bounded out of his chair and came running right at the two of them. And when he got there the father swung at the child and slapped him across the ear. Then the father yelled at his son, "What in the blankety-blank have you done now?" Out of breath, he turned to Dr. Dykes and said, "I'm sorry, mister, for whatever he's done. I've tried everything. I don't know what on earth to do with that boy. I try to beat some sense into him every night, but it doesn't seem to do any good!"

This reminded me of an experience of a young minister who was assigned to a downtown church. Trying to make the best of the situation the young man developed a program for inner city children. There were games; there was food after school, Bible stories, and singing. Forty-five, fifty, sixty children every day, games, food, fun, singing, and Bible study.

A mother came and said to the young minister, "Are you the one running this program?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"My son's in this program."

"Well, we're glad to have him. We're having a good time. I hope he's having a good time."

"Well, he can play the games, and he can eat the food, but I don't want him listening to any of those stories."

"We just get them out of the Bible. They're just Bible stories."

"Well, I don't want him listening to any of those stories."

"Why? We're not trying to indoctrinate him. We're just telling Bible stories."

"He's gotten to where he's coming home now, thinking he's as good as anybody in Kansas City, and you're setting him up for bitter disappointment. I don't want him to hear those stories anymore."

Dr. Butts concluded by writing: "Some stories haunt me. I hope they haunt you also!"

We as a church address the long-term problems that people acquired as children and never outgrew. No wonder we need God to help us in our ministry.

Come, Worship
Stay, Learn
Go, Serve