



July 28, 2013
Colossians: 2: 6-15.

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Do you ever go out on Saturday night and dance in the moonlight...with your clothes off? What? Did I say something wrong?

Two-hundred and fifty young soldiers at Ft. Bragg did just that while I was there. No kidding, you may have read about it in the paper. Of course, the soldiers parents heard about it, got upset and called their senators, who then contacted the Army. Still, the soldiers danced in the moonlight. But, the outcry was too much, so the senators started making loud noises about it: "Soldiers at Ft. Bragg are taking their clothes off and dancing in the moonlight!"

This may seem strange but there is an explanation:

The soldiers had formed themselves into a group, and called it religious and Wiccan, as in witches. Now, this got my attention as a chaplain, and, I was a little amused at all the hoopla they were creating. Especially, since some of these night-dancers were soldiers from my unit. So, I started snooping around among the ranks.

One day while visiting a young female soldier, I noticed a picture of her on her desk with a witch hat on. Knowing well what it was *supposed* to

mean, and also knowing that she was one of the soldiers playing around in the woods, I *innocently* asked if that was a picture of her on Halloween.

“No,” she said seriously, “That’s me getting ready for worship back when I lived with my mother.”

“Hum...” I continued on *unknowingly*. “Why did you worship with that hat on?”

“I’m a witch,” she said. “My mom is a Wiccan and so am I, so we’re witches!”

“Oh,” I said brightly. “Well, if you ever want to talk about religion I’m here for you.”

“Okay,” she said. And, of course, I never heard from her.

It just so happens that when Larry and I lived in the Phoenix area at the time the national group of Wiccans came to town for a meeting. I had never heard of them before but the newspapers were full of what being a Wiccan was about. To put it simply, and it really isn’t simple, they sort of worship the Earth... much like the Native Americans did, some still do.

If this is true, where did the soldiers get the idea they could form a group and dance in the woods and call themselves Wiccan? Where did the young soldier’s Mom get the idea that they needed to wear a pointy hat for worship?

The answer is, lots of places. This good book we call the Bible could be one, since it is so often misread. Let's take the verse right after our scripture passage for this morning, verse 16, it reads: "Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath Day." I'm sure there are other verses that could serve this group's needs, but I choose this one.

PLUCK! That's all you have to do. Take one verse out of context in the Bible and you've got your authority to do just about anything you want to do religiously, politically, ethically, spiritually, and so on. The Bible says so!

Back to the story: the senators did finally get the attention of the Ft. Bragg Commanders when all this religious dancing and nudity hit the Army Times and the local newspapers. So...it was handed over to the chaplains, since it had to do with religion. Ah...I thought, now we have to ruin their fun!

I mean, after all, when I was 18, I pledged a sorority, and as a new pledge got to push Limburger Cheese with my nose across the front lawn of the sorority house while the fraternity men from across the street stood and laughed! These soldiers didn't have the opportunity (if that's the right word) to do some of what I did then. And how many initiations, right or wrong,

are any worse than dancing nude in the Moonlight? My sorority initiation song paid homage to “*a much-feared goat!*”

But, that wasn't the point, said the senators, and now the commanders. So, along with the other chaplains, we gathered up these soldiers, brought them into the chapel community and had a real Wiccan, who was a Warrant Officer, head them up. After two weeks of Sunday worship in the chapel buildings, the group dwindled from 250 down to five. It seems Sunday mornings were not as much fun as Saturday night dinner and a show!

The young soldiers were having fun. And...they were trying out faith, like trying on a hat, it may have fit and it may not have fit. Trying on something doesn't mean you're going to buy it. Yes, they could have ended up like the young soldier's mother in some splinter group where they wore witch hats, but some of them may have ended up there anyway. Or they could have ended up in a church somewhere after experimenting with their faith.

I'm not condoning their behavior, I just tolerated it with a smile on my face! I understood their parents, too. It was just as hard for those parents to hear that their children were dancing in the moonlight as it would be, for me, if Sadie dyed her hair purple. Restrict it, and she's going to add green to the purple. Every parent knows this, if they understand children. And, at age

18-22 these soldiers were still children.....experimenting in the field. After all, as soldiers, they could not dye their hair purple or green or wear earrings in their noses. As soldiers they couldn't even wear earrings in their ears, in uniform.

As adults, many of us have experimented with our faith. We may have done something that seems silly to us now, like trying out Hinduism, Buddhism, LDS, Jehovah's Witnesses, or even...Methodist! Perhaps, we were nothing...that *could* be worse than experimentation.

As adults, and certainly the age and stage most of us are in this church, we are well rooted in our Baptism and have been raised up with Christ as we continue to establish our faith. We are never finished establishing thus never finished experimenting. And this is what Paul was telling the Colossians. VS 6: "As you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him." We still have to be told to live like Christians.

Think back, those of you who were raised Christian. Did you ever try and deny it: ever tuck the cross you were wearing around your neck in your shirt in front of certain people? I went to a Jewish Synagogue in my early 20's...just checking it out. That was about the same time-frame I broke up with my college sweetheart because he wanted to be a minister (Methodist

by the way). Judaism lasted a week for me because I had been born in Christ and baptized in the faith. It was too ingrained to *really* walk away.

What was happening to the Colossians wasn't that they were walking away from their faith, they were, instead, threatened by some of the worshipping groups around them that seemed strange or different ~ like the parents of the soldiers were threatened on behalf of their children. They were afraid that some deceitful philosophy was infiltrating their community ~ and perhaps it was.

So, Paul came back at them by saying, "Look, if you're following the head of this body (that would be Christ), then no one is going astray. But what you have to do is stick together like a body. Without the head, the arms and legs break and splinter. Splinters blow away. And, it is the responsibility of the members of the body to make sure the other members of the body don't stray, that's it, period. When splinter groups happen, bickering begins and continues, and there is no growth. In fact, things diminish. And if you are trying to just be you and only you???...being a member of a worshipping body is not all about you, it is about the entire body. Don't try to go it alone because no individual can ever survive on his or her own.

That's hard to hear for some of us who feel we got where we got because of me and only me! But Paul comes back at them in the Greek by using the 2nd person plural of the word YOU, which is hard for us to distinguish in the English language. That is, unless you are from the south or from Oklahoma where we used the word: "y'all", or "all y'all". If Paul were a southerner he'd say, "All, y'all stick together now, and I mean all, y'all. There's no Valerie, or Bill or Sally. All, y'all must stick together like glue, no matter if one wants foot-washing and the other says ~ Yuk ~ you go ahead and do the foot washing and you'll probably all gain from it."

The Westminster Confession of Faith in the Presbyterian Church says in order to reach Salvation, you must have tried to take everyone to Heaven with you. Not in those words, those are my words. But we must stop thinking that there are the Evangelical Goofies and the Liberal Loonies. We must keep our minds on higher things like salvation for all and then we will have managed to gain something from it.

You may be wondering if my initial story about the soldiers is ever coming back into this message. It is. Very simply: Paul says we must share all our experiences and make them a part of our history. The good, the bad, and the ugly. Very often, if a church has an historian, that historian will put together a glowing history of the congregation for those who could come

there in the future. “Don’t do this” he says; “if you do that you add to the threat because you are then saying that redemption is defined in some kind of human terms; some kind of human belief, and this limits growth.

We are all who we are because of our experiences and who we are as a body because of our combined experiences, no matter how strange they may have been. Come together in the body of Christ, and He and only He, puts them together for the good of y’all...all ya’ll.