Three Times A Lady

There was an article this week on the *USA Today* website regarding the naming of collegiate women's teams. The piece, authored by Christine Brennan, takes the position that the use of the term *Lady* in front of a mascot demeans the stature of female athletics. She mentioned a number of universities, concentrated in the south, which have retained the gender link. Most prominent of those Brennan referred to would be the University of Tennessee *Lady Vols* who captured the NCAA basketball crown last evening.

*Tennessee’s* legendary coach, Pat Summitt, disagrees and feels the title is woven into the fabric of the team's statewide and national fan base. Summitt believes the *Lady Vols* moniker will remain unchanged. Brennan's viewpoint is that it is a patronizing tag. I asked the girls in my classes their opinion. Most like the fact that our *Westbury Christian* girls' teams are called the *Lady Wildcats*. Their reasoning revolved around the belief that *Lady* distinguishes them from our boys' teams. I agree with Christine Brennan that the use of *Lady* can lead to some awkward names. The mens' teams of Centenary College (Louisiana) are deemed the Gents, short for Gentlemen, I suppose. That would make the womens' squads the *Lady Gents*, a perfect oxymoron. But I think it's a stretch to see the use of *Lady* as offensive. The girls in my Bible classes certainly aren't offended by it. Maybe they just haven't been educated enough.

I sat by Shara in Bible study tonight. Several summers ago, I preached Shara's wedding to Russell, my fellow teacher/coach at *WCS*. Recently, I asked her why she referred to me as *Coach Hawley* when her younger sister Emilee, who was on my high school basketball team, addresses me as *Steve*. 
Shara told me she just could not use my first name. I told her that from that point on, I would refer to her as Mrs. Carr. The twenty-five year old Shara, mysteriously, has begun calling me Steve. In my school roll book in are always names I don't recognize. Some students choose not to go by their birth certificate names, often preferring a middle or nickname. I think you should be called what you want to be called. In Acts 11, we are told that the term Christians was first applied to believers in Antioch. I wonder who thought it up. What would a copyright be worth in today's market? Believers and disciples and followers of the way are all synonyms for the faithful in the scriptures but Christians has remained the more common title through the centuries. Since Shara is a woman, and an extremely beautiful one at that, does that make her a Lady Christian? In Galatians 3, Paul emphasizes that in Jesus there is neither male nor female. That's good enough for me. I think I can tell the difference anyway.

Applicable quote of the day:

"If you want anything said, ask a man. If you want something done, ask a woman."

Margaret Thatcher

God bless,

Steve

Luke 18:1

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posted by Steve Hawley @ 7:07 PM  
0 comments
The Musician

He was sitting in the upper school office right at the end of school this afternoon. Daniel, an eighth grader from Korea, had a instrument case on his lap. Our middle school American History instructor, Ruby Parker, requires each of her students to display a talent in her section on vaudeville. Some of the kids did skits or interpretive dance. Daniel played the violin. At the urging of several faculty members, he opened the case and played us a song. Actually, it was a piece by Bach. Chaul, one of my Chinese students and a senior, was standing there and, as a fellow violinist, identified the work for me. She told me Bach's compositions are difficult. From my non-existent musical expertise perspective, Daniel performed it flawlessly. I was blown away. As he concluded and we effusively praised him, I discovered Daniel is a student with perhaps the most prestigious violin teacher in Houston. Maybe he's the next Itzhak Perlman! At thirteen, Perlman won a talent competition in his native Israel, facilitating his studying at Juilliard in the United States. From there, he has gone on to be what many consider the premier violinist of his generation. That journey sounds suspiciously like the one Daniel has embarked on. And I just thought he was another boy in my third period Bible class!

Teaching school gives me the chance to spend considerable time with really good young people. Sometimes, we see them in a very narrow slice of their lives. This afternoon, I saw Isa, one of my favorite all-time students, standing in the hallway. I didn't recognize her at first because she was not in her school uniform. She didn't look any different but her outfit wasn't WCS regulation gear which is how I have viewed her for the past three years.
There is so much more to these kids than is readily apparent as they sit in front of me in wooden and metal desks. Two weeks ago, I found out that Brian, a student in Daniel’s class, is one of the highest rated skiers in his age group in the country. Like Daniel, Brian is very quiet in my presence and his exceptional talent went unnoticed by me. Jesus saw gifts in people that his contemporaries were blinded to. He saw a former demon possessed maniac as a missionary who could tell of God’s great mercy. He gazed into the hearts of the sinful and saw faith where others only detected fault. He looked up in a tree and called down a tiny tax collector and labeled him a child of Abraham while Abraham’s other sons called him a thief and a traitor. The Lord looks down on Daniel and beams at a young man with extraordinary musical gifts. Until today, I just saw an eighth grader who I wish would study just a little bit more. Today, I listened to Bach being brought to life on a violin and maybe, just maybe, I heard what Jesus sees.

Applicable quote of the day:

"I sounded like a thirteen year old with alot of promise."

Itzhak Perlman

God bless,

Steve

Luke 18:1

posted by Steve Hawley @ 7:01 PM  0 comments

Monday, April 02, 2007

The Open Door

My sophomore classes spent their time today covering the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man. It is a glimpse into the afterlife from the mouth of the Savior that challenges what many of these kids have been taught. There is recognition and memory, there is awareness and physical attributes are ascribed to the dead. We know the Lord may have been speaking in a way
we might comprehend, but I also include that because Jesus used a name, some scholars believe this is no parable but an event lifted directly from a scenario in the next worlds. I mention that Jesus defines Lazarus as a **beggar**. Some students feel it is an insult to bear that title but I point out that the poor man was the one saved, not the wealthy one. Trying to make it applicable, I recounted a recent incident where a man asked me for money so he could buy supper. Normally, I would help but the guy was drinking a beer in a paper bag so I politely declined. Some, but not all, the kids thought I made the right choice. Glory demurred, feeling it was not my job to determine how he would spend the money, basing her argument on Jesus' command to feed the hungry, which had no corollary stating 'unless they are drinking beer.' Maybe she's right and I should give and let God sort it out. It would be easier if there was a step-by-step manual for each case that arises.

In this month's edition of the **Christian Chronicle**, there is a neat story about a little church in Remmel, Arkansas, except it's not as small as it was. The congregation, stagnating as so many rural churches seem to, began simply opening its doors for community meetings to discuss relevant issues to those in this tiny agricultural village. There was no pressure and no preachiness, simply reaching out to those with the hurts a cruel world can dish out. They came...and found acceptance. Love lead to prayer and prayer lead to revival. That small band of disciples began ministering to the meth users and all the other **sinners** in town. They began sending the village youngsters, one hundred strong last summer, to church camp and footing the bill. The kids pull the parents into the orbit of the gospel. In four years, nearly ninety souls have been baptized into Jesus Christ in an era when many country churches are calling it quits. Of course, the congregation is sprinkled with ex-cons and addicts, the former lost souls that are hungering for the truth of Jesus Christ. In John 4, while lingering in a Samaritan village, Jesus tells his men that a great harvest is all around them; they just needed to see it. The vision of believers in Remmel, Arkansas now measures **20-20**. I wish it were contagious.
What Then Is This Child Going To Be?

Applicable quote of the day:
"Great opportunities to help others seldom come, but small ones surround us daily."
Sally Koch

For more on the Remmel church, go to www.christianchronicle.org and scroll down to Feature: Rural Revival.

God bless,
Steve
Luke 18:1

posted by Steve Hawley @ 6:13 PM  0 comments

Sunday, April 01, 2007

The Biography

It seemed appropriate. In conjunction with April Fools' Day, CBS Sunday Morning ran a piece on Clifford Irving this morning. A movie, The Hoax, is set to premier this month, chronicling Irving's fake biography of reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes. In 1970, the forty year old Irving persuaded the McGraw-Hill publishing company to give him three quarters of a million dollars, convincing them he had been chosen by Hughes to write his life story. Irving produced handwritten letters from Hughes which Irving himself had forged. (The letters even passed the scrutiny of hand writing experts.) He volunteered to take, and passed, a polygraph test. When asked on the lie detector if had ever met Hughes, Irving truthfully answered yes, later explaining he had been introduced to Hughes as a little boy, allowing him to give an honest answer. The scheme finally disintegrated when the one thing Irving thought would never occur, happened. Howard Hughes, the most secretive celebrity in America, went public and denounced the biography as fraudulent. Irving, his wife, and Richard Suskind, who had helped him make up the Hughes interviews, all served jail time. Clifford Irving, Cornell educated
and blessed with the boldness that only con men can muster, became synonymous with intellectual fabrication.

As they discussed the movie in which Richard Gere plays the role of Irving, I was amazed at the reaction of the real life scammer. Clifford Irving, now seventy-six, appeared to be very offended that the facts of the movie were inaccurate. Can you say ironic? How could anyone pull off a stunt for as long as Irving did? We believe because we want to believe. Hughes was such a fascinating character that the public ate up the slightest bit of information about his life as an aviator, financier, and romancer of the most beautiful women in show business. Irving’s claims were so outlandish— he even fooled brutal interviewer Mike Wallace— that they had to be true. There are many New Testament cautions for believers to be on the watch for deceivers. Jesus foretold impostors claiming to be him. The epistles follow that theme, sounding the alarm that Christians can be tricked, if we are not careful, by smooth arguments and empty words. We laugh when someone pulls one over on us. But when the deceit is spiritual in nature, Paul warns of the wrath of God, no laughing matter. Irving’s hoax, which he claimed was never meant to be malicious, landed him in prison for over a year. Deceptions which impact on our faith can have a much more stringent, and permanent, sentence.

_Applicable quote of the day:

"I was on a train of lies. I couldn’t jump off."

_Clifford Irving_

_God bless,_

_Steve_

_Luke 18:1_

posted by Steve Hawley @ 1:07 PM  0 comments

_Thursday, March 29, 2007_

_Hope Springs_
I'm not sure if it was M.C.'s idea or if Buster had the brainstorm. Parents of sons at Georgia Christian School, together they proposed constructing a baseball field in the middle of our campus. For a not long out of college graduate and novice coach, it was a dream come true. M.C. raised the funds and verbalized the vision while Buster, a long-term umpire and baseball man, was in charge of the layout. They came up with the equipment to do the cutting of the dirt area and the red clay was provided by, I think, the county from its excavations. The kids on the team, as well as other volunteers, shoveled and raked and pushed the wheel barrows. When the dust cleared and the fence/dugouts were installed, we had a beautiful field and its inherent advantage. The Generals, for the first time in the seventy year history of the school, had a home.

I was pretty green back then. Folks like M.C. and his lovely wife, Donna, took me in like another son. Plenty of Sunday dinners found me around the table at their rural home. Their son, Dean, was one of my students, armed with one of the most subtle senses of humors to sit in my classroom. Dean didn't play baseball but it didn't stop M.C. from spearheading the drive that would be a blessing to the school. This Spring marks the twenty-fifth edition of a GCS squad to patrol Alumni Field, the title chosen for the diamond. I don't know any of the kids but I'm sure I would recognize some of their parents and one of my former players is one of the coaches. The field has undergone some renovations in the quarter century since ground was first broken. Somewhere, there are pictures of that first workday. All of us were much younger that September, including M.C. and Buster...and me.

I called M.C. and Donna tonight. It wasn't an out of the blue, nostalgia conversation. The past two years have been rough on their family. Two summers ago, Dean, a diabetic, collapsed and died before he reached forty. He left behind his wife, Dorothy, one of my basketball players, and two children. Then, this past fall, an antique tractor fell on M.C. as he was loading it into a trailer, pinning him underneath. I think some folks didn't think M.C.
was going to make it. They underestimated M.C. ... and the power of prayer. He is on the fourth phase of his rehab, after spending considerable time in a physician-induced coma. I thought I might be able to lift their spirits but as always is the case, I was the one encouraged. M.C. was effusive in his thanks for those who prayed non-stop on his behalf and ebullient on the rapid pace of his recovery. Donna talked about her hopes for Georgia Christian and the continued impact it makes in the lives of children. Grieving is a leveler and I know they have had their dark moments but in our fifteen minutes of reacquainting, they exuded a spirit of optimism. It isn't difficult to pinpoint the source of their strength. Their faith in God has sustained them through the nightmare accompanying the death of a child and the trauma of a near fatality. Peter defined the trust in God by which this family has persevered:

"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." (1st Peter 3:15)

Hope is a four letter intransitive verb that symbolizes a family of believers. The major league baseball season throws out the first pitch in seventy-two hours. Every team has a chance, at least in the hearts of the most loyal followers, to make some waves in the standings this season. Without hope, there is not that expectation of success which can propel an also-ran to a pennant contender. This is the time of year for baseball believers. For the M.C.s and Donnas of the planet, all year is Spring time in their hearts. Hope is what they know and hope is how they live. It's a pretty solid foundation.

Applicable quote of the day:

"Baseball is what we were. Football is what we have become."

Pearl S. Buck

God bless,

Steve

Luke 18:1

posted by Steve Hawley @ 7:14 PM   0 comments
Tuesday, March 27, 2007

Spelling Bee

It was one of those notes/prayer requests on quizzes that break my heart. This week, a girl in one of my classes summed up her life with these words: "Coach, please pray for my family because my parents may be splitting up."

I don’t know the mom or the dad but I know their daughter. She’s a great kid who just wants her folks to stick it out, to give it one more try. She's not taking sides unless you take the view that it’s selfish for a child to want to keep a family unit intact. She isn’t blind; she can read the handwriting on the wall and probably wishes she was illiterate when it comes to the dissolution of a marriage. In Tammy Wynette's country classic, D-I-V-O-R-C-E, parents spell out words so their four year old son is protected from the impending breakup; words like S-U-R-P-R-I-S-E and every child's favorite word, C-U-S-T-O-D-Y. The young lady in my Bible class knows how to spell. She is most likely to learn the meaning of a new vocabulary word; H-E-A-R-T-B-R-E-A-K. Please keep her in your prayers. Her name is ...............

Applicable verse of the day:

"I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel.

*Malachi 2:16*

Applicable quote of the day:

"A divorce is like an amputation: you survive it, but there’s less of you."

*Margaret Atwood*

God bless,

Steve

*Luke 18:1*

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The Others

It's testing week at Westbury Christian. This morning, everybody from the kindergarten kids through eleventh graders began the Stanford Achievement Tests. The eighth graders, last names A through H, are assigned to me. After the initial handing out of answer sheets and distributing booklets, it's a breeze for the teachers. The time consuming stage is filling in information at the outset; name, date of birth, gender, teacher, school. The students have to color in the accompanying little circles which correspond to letters and numbers. As we neared the finish, we came to a box labeled "Race/Ethnicity." Our kids come from families with origins in numerous countries so this was going to be fun. Consider the options:

American Indian or Alaskan Native background- AI/AN
Asian background- A
Black or African American background- B/AA
Hispanic or Latino background- H/L
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander background- NH/PI
White- W
Another background- O

Joel raised his hand, wondering which circle to color in. His family is from India but that doesn't fit into any category. One of the kids told him he should put AI (American Indian) because he is an American citizen with Indian ancestry. We laughed. He settled on O, as in others.

Early in the school year, I tell my students that everybody in the world is either male or female and all of us are either Jewish or Gentile. They get the male/female demarcation but some do not know the Jewish/Gentile distinction. Many discover for the first time they have a new Gentile ethnicity!
I try to make the point that since Jesus came and broke down the walls of division, we Gentiles have been blessed to be invited into the kingdom of God on equal footing. Paul worded it like this:

"For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile- the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him." (Romans 10:12)

Hopefully, time breaks down barriers of race and ethnicity that have no place in the worship of the God who created all the skin colors. The kids at our school don't make a big deal of it. Maybe someday adults won't either and we won't need ethnic boxes on standardized tests. For now, Joel is happily an O.

Maybe I can be an O, too. Sometimes W is boring!

Applicable quote of the day:

"We allow our ignorance to prevail upon us and make us think we can survive alone, alone in patches, alone in groups, alone in races, even alone in genders."

Maya Angelou

God bless,

Steve

Luke 18:1

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