

SAVED!

Ford

1

Randy Ford
1053 W. District
Tucson, Arizona 85714
(520) 889-1963
www.randyfordplaywright.com

SAVED!
by
Randy Ford

I'm not sure we missed a Sunday. If for some reason we couldn't go to church, we kept the Sabbath holy at home. It would prove to be the best method that my parents had for taming me. It was certain my mother thought that if for some reason I didn't get my weekly dose of the Gospel I would soon degenerate into a hooligan. In her mind there seemed to be a direct relationship between good behavior, clean clothes, and God. I'm not sure, however, God would've been that picky.

Sunday meant resting from the burdens of the whole week, not only as it pertained to school, work and a hectic Saturday, but also as it provided members of the congregation relief from his or her sins. We brought our marked Bibles, sang old hymns, and sat in our pews and prayed. We expected that we'd hear from Reverend Brown. We knew he'd preach, work on our consciences, and not give up on us. Not only did he reach out to the lost, he also urged the *saved* to reenlist and hold the fort. The siege mentality extended way beyond the church parking lot.

I distinguished myself as much in the church by praying out loud as anyone else did. Blessed in that way, or...depending on your viewpoint...cursed, my voice boomed and would carry from the back of the balcony to the front of the sanctuary. For that Reverend Brown reprimanded me, and that would embarrass my parents. I knew then that I'd get lectured. But see! People told me I sounded like God. I wish that had been true. I could've cashed in then.

Ford

I'm one who would often argue but was just as often wrong as right. I would argue for the attention and would take either side regardless of whether it made sense or not. I would even continue arguing well past when my opponent gave up.

Now there was one opponent I hoped would never capitulate. A good history of my quarrels with Him, however, was never kept. Even if I applied myself, I couldn't remember them all. Let's just say I struggled, which may explain my restlessness and why I squirmed in the pew. There's no need for me to embellish this conflict: the internal one, decided by combat and show, would've overpowered almost anyone else. So, I'd look up out of the corner of my eye, as I prayed, hoping, but not sure, that my voice would carry far enough. Surely, God wouldn't give up.

Most of the quarrels I had, then, proceeded from something I did wrong, and, according to my mother and Reverend Brown, the devil stood nearby after having led me astray. The devil had to have been behind it. Our preacher seemed to lack the ingenuity to come up with any other explanation such as maybe I was a little devil and never the goody-two-shoes everyone seemed to want me to be. "You surprised me," they'd say. "And more than a little disappointed."

Our preacher Reverend Brown, feeling superior, would wag a finger at us. He would likewise refer to the Bible and rail from the pulpit at his own expense. He often used Jeremiah, the prophet of doom, to make his case. Then when the time came for the altar call, he would locate those members of the congregation who couldn't stay awake and make an example of them. He would shame them and at the same time employ the old hymn "Just as I Am" with the declaration "O Lamb of God, I come! I come!"

"Come! Come!" he would plead. "Come!"

Ford

He would pray and plead with us to accept Jesus as our personal Savior. It was during that part of the service that I felt most vulnerable and, indeed, felt like getting up out of my pew and running out the door. This urge, one Sunday, led to my conversion. Here's what happened.

As Reverend Brown cautioned his flock, it seemed as if he paid particular attention to me. He wouldn't let me sleep through his sermons; so he and God must've had something in mind...I mean something big...maybe. I often felt a tug, something ill-defined at first. I'm not sure now what tripped me up. All I remember is that Reverend Brown had lengthened the altar call by several minutes; and as I headed for the door, I heard him call my name. "Me?" It seems now as if he signaled with his index finger. "Come!"

A boy's first concern should be to avoid a display of tears; his next, to appear strong. The first will interfere with the latter, so it seems odd that I would allow myself to cry in front of the whole congregation. If the truth were known, I wasn't in control of my emotions when I found myself pulled down the long aisle with a bowed head. I couldn't see...which should be understood as a blessing. With a Bible in his hand, Reverend Brown led me to the front pew, where he sat beside me. I had accepted his invitation: now he received me warmly by placing an arm around me. His words comforted me. There was not one person in the congregation that didn't understand the significance of my decision. I had accepted Jesus. I looked up and found Him, or He found me. Another person *saved*. Another person added to the year's tally. One less person to worry about.

Ford

Infinitely pleased, my mother wept. My parents knew that they had achieved a great victory upon which they could finally rest. But all who knew my parents knew they wouldn't. I must not omit that on that Sunday they changed their routine and took me out to lunch. I was no fool. I ordered steak. And my dad was no fool either because he made me eat it all.

Since Reverend Brown was the caregiver of the whole congregation, he would remind us of our humanity and wouldn't let us forget that we were all sinners and had fallen short of the expectations of Jesus. But I must confess, when I considered what I was doing, and went over in my mind all of the temptations around me, I questioned whether or not I had really been sincere when I accepted Christ as my Savior. I didn't feel rescued; but as I was pretty well acquainted with my nature and the more I learned about it, the more the danger increased; and I became less resolute. For this reason, I needed a reminder each week, which shouldn't have surprised anyone.

But there was one unintelligible being that I feared most of all, and I confess to you that I found it very hard to believe that he really existed except in our hardened hearts. An honest assessment may not be what anyone wants, when we're faced with eternal damnation. I would like to think the stakes were never that high and that Satan could be shuffled off to a far away place. So fly away, Satan, fly away. Pray, sir, don't miss your plane. Get out of here.

This was the opposite of what Reverend Brown most wanted to convey to us. Of course, Reverend Brown didn't think the way I did. To him there were strict rules that had to be followed or else. To him, Satan was real, cunning and real, and couldn't be tricked into buying a ticket out of town. Reverend Brown spoke with great alacrity and

Ford

ease, but as he did, you knew he meant what he said. With great authority, he laid down the law.

Placed on particular notice were those rowdy kids in the balcony, which included me and the preacher's own son AJ. Reverend Brown would often single us out; and, when he was particularly pleased with his pronouncements, he would shout at us three or four times, "Amen!" That would get our attention, when nothing else would.

By preaching on the sins of our generation, a topic he obviously liked, Reverend Brown would put us on the spot. Sixteen year olds, however, could only be blamed for so much of the world's problems: there was only so much guff we could stand. Then there was also the danger that we might revolt. I'm not sure what we would've done, but there was always that possibility. *Saved* or not, AJ, Reverend Brown's own son, turned out to be his greatest challenge.

A few Sundays after my conversion I was very much surprised to see my friend AJ, at the very beginning of the altar call, strut down the aisle and in front of the congregation rededicate his life to Jesus. This display of piety disturbed me because I knew AJ. He had been the biggest troublemaker around, and then, all of sudden, goodness.... AJ was remarkable for showing off, and now in front of everyone, was kicking his heels simply to be noticed. All of the attention AJ received set off an adverse reaction in me. Call it envy, I'd call it that. Envy and crazy making, though exerting in a direct way on my own behavior, led to even more craziness. As I said, we knew AJ.

The rest of the congregation were not in tune enough to see anything ridiculous in his behavior. Besides, only his friends really cared enough to feel embarrassed for him.

Ford

I mean, who really knew him? Who could predict at any given moment what he would do?

After the benediction, nobody stirred from the pew until Reverend Brown and his corralled kid had gone past. As AJ walked by, I shook my head. From where I sat, I saw his smile; and even now it sticks in my craw.

I must've said something to my mother about AJ for her to tell me that I should be more concerned about my own conduct than his. We both had a Bible given to us by Reverend Brown as an incentive, and accompanied with it was a compliment he paid my parents. He said he appreciated the difficulties that they had with me: and, that he encouraged them to turn to God for answers. He then promised them that he would make an extra effort to keep track of me.

The competitive nature of AJ and me assured that there would be a great deal of conflict and we'd live in a perpetual state of war. AJ was always picking on me, and I, a revengeful person, always looked for ways to get even. Here we were, with the church as our field of battle. AJ had formed his clique of hooligans while I maintained a group of Christian friends and, as often as I could and everyway possible, insinuated my superiority. In short, our roles were reversed: he was the preacher's kid and should've been a better Christian than me. He threatened me, and I prayed for him.

Feuds the nature of ours, though not uncommon, were not supposed to occur within the church, where members were supposed to show love and respect for each other and very likely were connected by shared dogma. Because of our parents, we went to the same church; and because of that, how important was it for AJ and I to call a truce? Well, that didn't happen.

Ford

My worthy adversary AJ was considered a “lady’s man.” He received undeserved attention from the opposite sex. Girls were always running up to him. He met groups of them at church, at the mall, at school, or wherever. But most often the church seemed to be the scene of his flirting, and the girls would flirt back. He would always have one or two of them hanging onto his arms. He never got any peace. Poor guy! I had to commiserate. I never thought he ever had sufficient looks to warrant all of the attention. It all seemed contrived.

He was tall and dark, a skinny boy, and qualified as a jock. He went to church at least three times a week, and, because of that, surprised people when he got into trouble. At church, there was not one person who didn’t recognize him, and that meant he had a hard time getting away with anything. I suppose that created an impossible situation for him. When it suited him, he could be good; but when it didn’t, well, what can I say?

But I must confess, when I consider how I embarrassed AJ, and took him down a notch or two, I still smile. Oh, my! I seized on a great opportunity. I undertook, I thought, something worthy of a scoundrel and felt good about it. For that reason, I claimed full responsibility, though I knew it would upset my mother. Thus, whenever I can, I retell the story. It happened sometime after he made a public spectacle of himself by rededicating his life to Jesus.

AJ, coming out of the restroom just as some girls came out of theirs, and at the same time as I stood at a water fountain, approached me as if we were friends. That was when I saw he had forgotten to zip his fly. I think I caught him off guard when I yelled, “Your fly, you forgot to zip your fly. It’s unzipped!”

“Oh!” the rascal exclaimed, as he looked down and fugitively zipped his pants.

Ford

When he wept, I wished more people could've seen him. Sometimes the impact of something like that is greater than expected and other times it wouldn't matter. (He could've not reacted at all.) In the lowest form I drew attention to the fact that he had peed down his leg. That angered him, and his anger turned to hostility in an instant. But why should he have been angry with me? He peed on himself and that often happens, to our mortification, when we're sometimes careless as we stand in front of a urinal. Had there not been girls around, I don't think it would've fazed him.

My exuberance and overwhelming duplicity didn't end with my drawing attention to AJ's wet pants. As I've stated before, I really wanted to embarrass him. Therefore, when he looked down to zip his pants up I deflected some water from the fountain onto his crotch, which enlarged the wet spot on his trousers.

"Look," I yelled. "Look, look, look! Look at AJ. Look, who's peed in his pants!"

That was when I ran, and he chased me.

That there should've been more restraint on my part is something I'm not afraid to admit. That of all the mistakes boys and men make peeing on oneself may be the most embarrassing. Everything deteriorated from there, my descent was easy to follow and a continual series of things happened that at each turn were predictable. There was AJ running to his father and the involvement of my parents. It shouldn't have been a really big deal. Boys will be boys, and they show off all the time, not to mention play pranks on each other when they think they can get away with it. There was the urine/water stain that thanks to me seemed to have taken on a life of its own, if you consider that the urine was barely visible before I deflected the water and made a big deal of it. To many in the

Ford

congregation my conduct that Sunday morning seemed incomprehensible; otherwise it wouldn't have made a difference to any of them; and so on, till they discussed my motive. Somewhere behind all of that people said you'd discover the involvement of the devil, only each individual had a different take on it. And in that context, opportunities arose to preach about the infinite power and wisdom of Jesus. So the following Sunday my descent provided Reverend Brown an object lesson and a sermon topic.

“Thou art a sinner,” and to the congregation, “Thou art his brothers and sisters in sin.”

Though there was a great deal of shock expressed, from which I gained considerable attention, there was still, I think, something more wonderful and beneficial than that about AJ retaliation. Our rivalry became more intense before it finally subsided. Before it was over AJ's actions shocked people in the church more than mine ever did. After I embarrassed him, he had no where to go but down. And I, indeed, again played my role to perfection.

AJ, it seems, had been looking for me, when I came out of the restroom. A few Sundays had gone by without an incident, so his actions took me by surprise. I had expected him to do something to me before then, but he hadn't. Consequently, I let my guard down. For everyone's darling, I suppose, it took that long to overcome inner objections and find an opportunity to pounce on me when lots of people were around. Being a preacher's kid and obviously conscious of right and wrong, it must've been quite a struggle for him.

“Damn you,” AJ said before he lit into me. “Damn you!”

Ford

He hit me two or three times in the face and made my nose bleed. He would then be a good boy and fetch a wet paper towel from the bathroom to wipe up the blood. By then I had crumbled, much to AJ's dismay when he found me on the floor all curled up in a ball. He pleaded with me to hit him back...wanted that so that he could continue beating me. He hadn't expected me to simply take it. Oh, the passion and the theater, the pleading and crying and the words of piety, and I'm not now sure between the two of us who fared better.

It was with much satisfaction that I developed a limp. Dragging one leg, I told anyone who asked that AJ had kicked me. People commented on how well I had the limp down. So I thought that if I kept it up long enough word would get out that I had been seriously injured and I would win everyone's sympathy. Then when I had a huge crowd, I took great pains to emphasize "Oh, I'm not hurt!" For which reason I said I forgave AJ. And as he lay at the mercy of his father, I pleaded with Reverend Brown to spare the rod. AJ looked surprised. At the same time, I spared no pains to exaggerate my injuries.

And that gives a clue as to my motive. Why I limped down the aisle, dragging one foot. Why I didn't want anyone to touch my nose and it to stop bleeding. Why I rededicated my life that Sunday.

I limped down the aisle and walked away healed.

Reverend Brown reckoned with my rededication that all in all he had completed a very good morning's work; and if he hadn't had to punish his son, it would've been perfect. There were more serious offenses than mine and AJ's, and our greatest sin our insatiable appetite for attention. This, I say, was just part of growing up; though I know

Ford

there were many other things that caused our parents grief. But the rededication of my life to Christ seemed to mitigate all that...at least for the time being.

On our way home that Sunday, after all that had occurred, my father said the outcome called for eating out for lunch. It showed how magnanimous he could be. As we entered the restaurant with my mother on the verge of tears, we noticed that Reverend Brown and his family had beaten us to the last table at a window.

I'll never forget how, when I smiled and waved at him, AJ choked on a big piece of hamburger gristle. Asphyxia! His face turned blue. To save his life, I remembered my Heimlich skills. Oh, what a shame! Just kidding!