

## Let's Go Deeper...

### Wednesday, October 5

The elders meet every first Sunday after worship. Two of them bring lunch. Sunday was some tasty chili along with sandwiches and fixins. Donations for lunch go to the ministry of the serving elders' choice. Last Sunday's went to Helping Hands.

They then meet for an hour or so. Elizabeth goes over pastoral concerns. I have a "Rabbi Time" during which I teach for 10-15 minutes on an area that will enhance their confidence and competence as elders. Last Sunday we focused on their role as Shepherds.

We always close in prayer by standing, taking each others' hands, and offering sentence prayers around the circle of twenty.

But the elders' Sunday is not done. After the prayer's *Amen*, they head off two-by-two to take communion to members at home or in assisted living centers.

With last Sunday being World Communion Sunday, my mind was teeming with communion thoughts. As I watched the elders heading off to take the Lord's Supper to the members of their flock, I remembered a Sunday over four decades ago when, as a teenager, I went on home communion.

Once a month, members of our high school youth group would accompany the elders on home communion. My partner would always be Mr. Joe Ross. As we walked to his car, he never failed to remind me how he knew my father when "he was just a little whippersnapper" and how I was sure growing up fast.

"What are they feeding you, Shirey?" he'd ask. "You're gonna be a big 'un!"

Off we'd go on our rounds. One Sunday, we went to a nursing home, a sprawling complex at which we had several members. When we arrived at the central lounge, a half dozen folks were waiting for us. Several others arrived shortly thereafter. Mr. Ross took a quick headcount, saw we were missing one, and sent me off in search of a Mrs. Whitfield.

Not knowing my way around, I stopped at a nurses' station and asked directions to her room.

The nurse said, "Go down C Wing to the blue carpet, then right until you pass the nurses' station. Turn left down D Wing. It'll be the fourth door on your left, bed two." Or something like that.

I followed directions as best I could and entered a room where I found a woman in a wheelchair, head in hands. The curtains were drawn.

"Good morning Mrs. Whitfield," I said, "I've come to take you to communion. Ready to go?"

No response. I remember the woman's head slowly rising from her hands and her looking up at me with a quizzical expression. I couldn't tell whether she was surprised, confused, or had just awoken from a nap. Not knowing what else to do, I walked behind her wheelchair and proceeded to push her down the maze of corridors until we reached the spot where the other dozen or so were waiting for us.



I pushed her into place, walked over to Mr. Ross, and whispered, “I got lost.”

“That’s all right,” he whispered back, “but who’s that you brought back with you?”

“What do you mean?”

“That’s not Mrs. Whitfield.”

“It’s not?”

“No, but we’ll take Mrs. Whitfield communion after we’re done here.”

“But what about the lady I pushed down here?”

“No problem. This is the Lord’s Table. All are welcome.”

Mr. Ross handled the service from there. He filled the folks in on what was happening at the church. He introduced his sixteen-year-old associate (“Now young Shirey here is a fine young man. I knew his daddy when he was just a boy...”). He then said a prayer and the Words of Institution. I helped him pass out the bread and cup.

After the service, I rolled our guest in the wheelchair back to her room. Embarrassed at my gaffe, I fumbled for what to say. The poor lady is sitting in her room minding her own business when some teenager bolts in and hijacks her wheelchair to a communion service! I began to apologize, but had no sooner begun to talk than I noticed she was crying.

“Young man,” she said, “Before you came in, I was praying that I could have communion today. I haven’t seen anyone from my church for such a long time that I had given up hope. So I prayed that I could have communion. I was praying when you came in the room. I couldn’t believe my ears when you came in and said you’d come to take me to communion. Thank you, young man. Thank you.”

She extended her hand, gave mine a squeeze, and smiled.

Me? I was spooked. I went back to Mr. Ross and told him the whole story, how I had not followed the nurse’s directions properly, how I’d commandeered that poor lady’s wheelchair and brought her to our gathering, how she’d cried, and how she told me she had been praying for communion when I came in.

“I can’t believe I went to the wrong room and brought the wrong lady back for communion,” I said

“Shirey,” Mr. Ross said, “did you say *wrong* room? Did you say *wrong* lady?”

I nodded my head.

“Think about it,” he said, “Think about it.”

Older and somewhat wiser now, I still think about it. The sight of our elders heading out on World Communion Sunday to make their visits prompted me to think about it again.

“God can draw straight lines with crooked sticks,” is how I’ve heard it, even guiding clueless teenagers down crooked corridors to contribute to holy ends.



