

“Spiritual CPR”

Text(s): 1 Kings 17:17-24; Galatians 1:11-24; Luke 7:11-17

- Pastor Mike Pancoast

Ken was in his early thirties, and after a life of hard living had begun to settle down enough to be marrying material. Which is how I came to know him, as he and Tami, one of our members, had come to me to go through our marriage prep ministry. We were in the session in which we discussed the role of faith and faith practice, and Ken said, *“Yeah, I’m not hostile toward or against religion Tami and the kids can do whatever they want. It’s just not for me.”* Fair enough. I made my case, and Ken stated his position. There wasn’t much left to do but leave this one up to the Holy Spirit.

Fast forward seven years—Ken not only worshiped every Sunday and became a much more frequent worshipper even than Tami, he became a confirmation guide, even though Ken and Tami didn’t have any kids in the confirmation ministry as yet. Ken became as knowledgeable about the Bible as anyone I’ve ever met—he had purchased the Bible on CD and listened to the CDs as he drove truck during the week. He was as generous a giver as there was in the congregation. Ken’s young son from a previous relationship came to live with his dad after being kidnapped and then abandoned by his mother, and whatever it was that was going on in Ken’s life, came and lit on his son Gunner, as well. After a few months with his father, Gunner was baptized, and even leading up to that baptism, Gunner became an absolute sponge when it came to soaking up the stories and the practices of Christian faith. He *wanted* to pray for the Sunday School group he was in, and he was always quick to volunteer to acolyte and assist with communion when one of the other kids inevitably failed to show up. At the age of 8, Gunner became the congregation’s youngest lector.

What on earth happened to Ken...and then to Gunner? Nothing less than what happened to Saul on the way to Damascus...nothing less than what happened to the widow and her son at Nain...nothing less than what happened to that widow and her son at Zarephath. And that nothing less is that Ken and Gunner were brought by the movement of the Holy Spirit to a new life in Christ Jesus by the power of God.

Oh sure, along the way, that Spirit came contained as the Spirit always does, in something and in someone—in his then fiancée, Tami, who became the first connection Ken had had with the people of God since his own topsy-turvy youth took him away. It came contained in the pre-marriage ministry the congregation insisted our young couples went through. The Spirit came contained in the fellowship events created by the congregation, and it came contained in the eager meeting and greeting of individuals in the congregation who prayerfully had become convinced that they actually were the Spirit’s tools when Ken occasionally came to worship or to those fellowship events with Tami. The Spirit came contained in the monthly new member Bible and catechism small groups hosted at the parsonage, and it came contained in the long-time members of the congregation who came to those small groups to shepherd the seekers and who connected with Ken and learned right along side him. The Spirit came contained in the work projects the men’s group always had underway, and it came contained in the men of the congregation who got to know Ken, who asked him not only to be a part of their projects but also

in what way he would LIKE to be a part of their projects, and who modeled for Ken what fully integrated life within the people of God looked like.

You, of course, have heard the saying, “A leopard can’t change its spots,” and that is true, a leopard CAN’T do anything to change its nature. But when it comes to God, clothed in the flesh of Jesus Christ, blowing like the North Dakota wind through the power of the Spirit, contained in the people of God, the Church, all bets are off when it comes to what and who can and can’t be changed, even and especially hearts and minds hungry for life and congregations eager and willing to cast themselves to the Spirit’s wind. I’ve read about it in Scripture; I’ve seen it in life; and I can’t be convinced otherwise.