

Indians, Cowboys, Misfits and Christmas

Auxvasse Creek Indian Fellowship's December 2005 Talk
Bud Moellinger

150 years ago, more or less, in a relatively new town on the High Plains of Colorado, the town council decided that the town was ready to have a church. The town boasted two hotels, five saloons, a general store, two livery stables, a new school house and a new jail house. They (the people of the town) decided that they had just about everything a town needed, except a church. Money and building materials were quickly donated. All of the townspeople pitched in with the labor. And, soon a very picturesque, white frame church with a small steeple was erected on a prominent corner in the new town.

Now the people needed a minister. Well, after a few letters to the East, and a few weeks of waiting, the town received a telegram from a prestigious divinity school in the East, informing them that their newly ordained minister would be arriving on the train next week, to take the position of leader of their little flock.

On an early Spring Friday, the westbound train stopped in the little town. The young minister exited the train and introduced himself to the people who helped him carry his luggage to the small cabin behind the church which would serve as the Rectory. The young man quickly settled in, and began preparing for the first service in the new church that he announced would be on Sunday at 9:00 am.

At 9:00 on Sunday, the young minister excitedly entered the church. He looked around, and to his dismay, he saw that there was only one person seated in the church. Sadly, he looked at this person, a rather old and rough looking cowboy type, and sadly said, "Well... I guess we try again.... next Sunday."

The cowboy looked directly at the minister with a steel eyed gaze and said, "Now hold on a minute preacher. You know, if I went out with a wagon load of feed, to feed my cows, and only one of my cows showed up, I'd shore enough feed her!"

The minister, intimidated by the people he found in the west, and unsure of the wisdom of his appointment to such a place, saw the wisdom and compassion in the old cowboy's words. With new found confidence, he stepped up to the pulpit, and began his sermon. As he warmed up, he even amazed himself. He preached of fire and brimstone, the pearly gates, of salvation and repentance, for well over an hour. He was amazed at the recall he had of all the words of the Bible, and how the words just flowed from his lips. Pausing for a breath, he looked down at the cowboy and noticed that he was slumped over in the bench. He stepped down from the pulpit, approached the cowboy, grabbed his shoulder and shook him awake.

“Hey!”, He exclaimed, “You were just telling me about feeding that cow, and now here you are sound asleep, and acting like you don’t want to be fed any of the Gospel at all!”

With narrowed eyes, the cowboy replied, “Preacher it’s true. If I had that load of feed, and only one cow showed up to be fed, I’d feed her. But, I sure as Hell wouldn’t try to feed her the Whole Durn Load!”

I hope to try not to feed you all the Whole Durn Load here, but be forewarned, it will be a big majority of it.

This talk will be different from what we are usually used to here. I’ll be talking a little more about cowboys. Cowboys and Indians are pretty similar. Each hold a place in history, and for a few years their stories were intertwined. As far as white folks go, cowboys were probably as close to Indians as any white folks could be. Both were sort of misfits, for their time.

As I look around this room, I see a bunch of misfits, including myself. Let’s be honest or just downright painfully true. We, most of us in this room, just don’t fit in with the majority of people who live in this modern world. But, is that a bad thing? It might be a good thing, and if we look a little closer, we might find that we are in some good company, by being the misfits that we are.

First, let’s look at what makes us different from the so called normal majority of people living in this modern world. Lots of us live in more remote areas. It’s not that we don’t like or can’t get along with other people; it’s just that we can enjoy them more from a little bit of distance. Do you think that I could live in a town with a neighbor’s house on either side of mine, close enough that you could hear each family flushing their toilet? Maybe I could learn to live like that, but I’d bet that my neighbors would soon tire of me being their neighbor. But then, maybe they’d get used to a Fire ring in the yard, Tipi poles leaning against the house, camping equipment piled up on the front porch, and people sitting around the Fire and Drumming and Singing until the wee hours of the morning. I could go on and on, but you get the picture don’t you? I’m an OK guy, but I’m better experienced - from a little bit of distance, by the so called normal majority.

Anyway, let’s face it. We are just a bit different. Maybe that’s why we get along so good at Fellowships and Gatherings. Here we see there are people who are just as different as we are. That’s comforting; we are not alone in this world. There are others who are just like us. As compared to other people, we as Indians are just a bit different. So are others. Mennonites, Muslims, Amish and Cowboys, whom I’m going to talk a little more about, are some other groups of people who are also just a bit different.

Cowboys and Indians: The movies in Hollywood made us perpetual enemies. They are always fighting in the movies. If the two groups ever got along it was in

something like the Lone Ranger, where Tonto always got the second billing, even though he usually saved the Lone Ranger's butt, in most episodes. You know, I've listened to the first episode of the Lone Ranger. It was on radio first. And you know, the Lone Ranger was a Texas Ranger in that first episode, who was ambushed by a bunch of bad white guys. He was the sole survivor, the lone ranger, left for dead out of all his compadres. Tonto happened by, and rescued him, named him the Lone Ranger, and nursed him back to health. In typical Hollywood fashion, Tonto became subservient to the Lone Ranger, and was at his beck and call, throughout their radio and then television careers. The Lone Ranger became the boss of the poor "savage" who saved his life. Really don't you think it should have been the other way around? But, both of these guys were sort of outcasts. Just like Indians and Cowboys of the 1800's. Cowboys were people who were the outcasts of their time. They came to the west to live outside, and away from too many people, and too much so-called civilization. Lots of them came west after the Civil War, not knowing just quite where they fit in back home. Many were simply burnt out on the modern times that they had experienced in the more populated areas. They were misfits.

So were the Indians of that same time period. According to the White Folks, Indians were always misfits. Just simple minded savages who were getting in the way of progress and Manifest Destiny. If they couldn't be assimilated into the modern society of civilized people, it would be best to just eliminate them, as history shows us was tried time and again.

History shows us that contrary to Hollywood's portrayal, Indians and Cowboys intermingled, and didn't fight as much as the movie makers would like us to believe. There were actually Indians, who became Cowboys. And I imagine that there were white and black Cowboys who, by marriage or adoption, became Indians. Even back in Colonial times, laws were made and enforced among the white people that prevented fraternization with Indians, because so many whites would move off to live with the Indians.

In the 1800's, many Cowboys realized their similarities with the Indians in that their particular way of life, like the Indians particular way of life was going to disappear very fast. Did you ever watch the movie *Lonesome Dove*? Remember the part where Augustus is saying to his partner, that in a few years people like them were going to become extinct, just as the Indians were? He said that in a few more years the country would be crowded with churches and school houses, and people like them would not be welcomed among the civilized.

History shows us some wonderful alliances between Cowboys and Indians. Have you ever read *Going to Texas*, or *The Vengeance Trail of Josey Wales*, written by Forrest Carter? Wales was a confederate soldier, who near the end of the Civil War, had had enough of the fighting and wanted to start over in a new place. He was headed for Indian Territory in present day Oklahoma, where he knew he would be accepted by people who could understand him, those savage Cherokee, but wound up in Texas. Along the way he met up with Cherokee, Lone Watie, and a family who were moving

to Texas from the East. Wales became a Cowboy, and made an alliance with the Comanche, to allow both groups, White and Indian, to live at peace on the land. In a tense meeting with the Comanche War Chief, Wales said, "You and me are alike. Fighting is easy for folks like us. What is hard is the living". "We can agree to fight or live." So, the agreement was to live and to share the land.

I don't know how much of Carter's story is fact and how much is fiction, but I do know of a similar agreement between Charles Goodnight and Quanah Parker. Parker was a Comanche leader who fought the whites for years. Goodnight was the first white man to drive cattle from the Mexican border, north to Montana. Goodnight is remembered saying that he never met a Red Man who would break an agreement. The treaty between Parker and Goodnight, made with spoken word, and no help from the government or lawyers was never broken. It was simply an agreement between two gentlemen who respected each other. They reconciled their differences. They practiced reciprocity, in that each provided something the other desired, and they had a relationship. A living example of the 4 R's of harmonious living. (These being; Respect, Reciprocity, Reconciliation and Relationship).

So here we have two groups of different, yet similar people, whose accustomed ways of life were changing rapidly. Not too many of the so called normal majority of people of their time cared. The country was changing, and soon there would be no need for Indians or Cowboys. They needed to change or just quietly disappear. Here is a Cowboy song that illustrates how similar Cowboys and Indians were during that time.

Corn, Water and Wood

I was in the arroyo gathering strays
You know Cowboys and cattle don't get holidays
And I would have been finished 'cept for one little guy
Who kept leading me further away.
He went up on the mesa, across a ravine
Past the Indian ruins and the muddy red stream
And I stopped for a while 'cause I was bone tired
And, I guess that I started to dream.
I saw three painted horses
Three dark skinned men
Masks made of clay
And voices like wind
Singing, We seek the soul of all that is good
We come bearing Corn, Water and Wood
Stop and behold, all that is good
Give thanks for the Corn, Water and Wood
Now I'm an old trail hound and I've always believed
That your boots and your saddle, are all that you need
No miracles happen, no Angels appear

But, I swear, three men were standing there.
Then I shook myself over, Had I been asleep?
That's just three Pueblo children, tending their sheep
And they yelled Merry Christmas, as they brought me my stray
And their voices rang through the Mesquite
Singing, we seek the soul, of all that is good
We come bearing Corn, Water and Wood
Stop and behold, all that is good
Give thanks for the Corn, Water and Wood
We seek the soul, of all that is good
We come bearing Corn, Water and Wood
Stop and behold, all that is good
Give thanks for the Corn, Water and Wood

“Corn, Water and Wood”. That's the name of that song. All that is good. Corn, Water and Wood: That's all we need to keep our earthly forms alive. Anything else is just added blessings from our Creator.

Maybe the Cowboy who wrote that song was one of those Indians who became a Cowboy, or maybe he was just a white guy, who looked through his eyes with his heart, and realized the wisdom of the Indians.

Here's a poem by Baxter Black, a modern day Cowboy;

It was Christmas Eve at daybreak when we found him in the yard
His horse was porcupined with frost, the ground was frozen hard.
He must'a drifted in last night after we'd all gone to bed
And had a fatal heart attack, 'cause fer dang sure he was dead!
We recognized him right away as Tater Jack, the preacher,
A fire and brimstone hard-nosed man, with one redeeming feature
He believed! And took it upon himself to spread the Holy Gospel
In places where the reg'lar church had deemed it near impos'ble
We got to see him twice a year 'cause we wuz out a'ways
He usually came by Christmas and He'd stay a couple days
Now, Christmas in a cowboy camp's a pretty lonely place
And folks like us, that live alone, build a sorta carapace
Like turtles have. Which insulates our heart from too much feelin'
But Tater Jack cut no one slack! He preached like thunder pealin'
And got right down to the question.... What did Christmas really mean!
Was it just another winter day to ply the old routine?
He'd dump the **whole load** on us, but what the heck we had the time
And he was a grand diversion. Thumpin' Bibles ain't a crime.
But he'd end each Christmas sermon with the passages from Luke.
He explained, we were the shepherds... Which he meant as no rebuke,
Then he'd traipse us all out in the dark and point up and say,
“Fear not, I bring good tidings, Unto you is born this day

*A saviour, who is Christ the Lord! See them stars and us below....
They were shinin' on them shepherds then, two thousand years ago!
So ya see, that's how it started, with a bunch of guys like you
Who could see through all the hoopelah and give this day it's due.
That's why he told the shepherds first. See God trusts a simple man.
So he signed yer kind up early 'cause he knew you'd understand."*
Well, Tater Jack would ramble on but what he said held water
And it made us cowboys proud, and humble, like it ought'er.
Sam would play his ukelele and we'd sing a song or two
I recon we were better men 'cause Ol' Tater drifted through.
So finding' him this morning' put a damper on the day.
We thawed him out and combed his hair and stored his stuff away.
Then buried him this afternoon, on his final Christmas Eve,
We've all been sorta aimless since, maybe just too numb to grieve.
Russell Don had shot a sage hen and we saved it for tonight
It was good, and we sure ate it all... But Christmas ain't quite right.
Tater Jack made it official, a snubbin' post to tie to
He gave Christmas real meaning. So maybe we should try to
Carry on, like he would have us. Ain't none of us a preacher
But no line camp cowboys ever had a better teacher.
*"Sam if you can play Hark the Herald Angels on your uke,
I'll try and read the cowboy part... in those passages from Luke."*

Well, it's Christmas Season! Here is what the Bible says about one part of Christmas.
One very important part of Christmas.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An Angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the Angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a savior has been born to you: he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find the baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about". So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. Luke 2: 8-20 NIV

What an awesome story! Angels appeared to shepherds! Who were the shepherds? Weren't they similar to us? Weren't they some of the misfits of their time? They were people of the land. They lived outside. They lived out of town by themselves. They probably ended up as shepherds, because they just didn't fit in too well with the majority of the people in their modern times. They were much better off, away from the normal majority of the people who lived in the towns and cities. Amazing! Some of the first people who Creator wanted to know about the birth of Jesus, were misfits of their time. Sort of like us. And, Creator thought so much of them that they received first word about Jesus' birth. Just like in Baxter's poem, God trusts a simple man. God chose to tell the people who lived close to, and with the earth, first, about this magnificent happening. So if we are misfits, then we are in some mighty good company.

So, Jesus was born way off across the Big Water. Born to people very different from us. Who are we, Indians on Turtle Island, to think that Jesus would care about us, living way over here in our little part of the world? Living quite differently from those people of the Mid-East. Jesus was born there, to them. So why do we think he would care about us? Here's another passage from the Bible, that can speak to us. Us, as foreigners to those people over there, where Jesus was born. Us misfits on Turtle Island.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

" 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'"

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. Matthew 2: 1-12

These Wise Men or Magi were foreigners. They worshiped differently than the people of Bethlehem. They were Astrologers! They were misfits to the people of Bethlehem, but Creator accepted their praise and gifts for his son. The Magi were so different that they even had dreams that told them what to do! And, they saw things in the stars! That's something that the Christians of today try to tell us not to do, They tell us not to read the stars. That's evil! Of Satan, they say. Yet that's what the Magi did. They were misfits, that give us misfit's the hope of being accepted for who we are by the Creator of all. If these foreigners were accepted by Creator, I'll bet us foreigners and misfits are also accepted.

When you feel like a misfit, and that you don't belong in this world, and that you just don't, won't or can't ever seem to fit in, remember these words from the Bible;

If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. John 15: 19

In this passage, the world refers to the majority or those who are ruling or are in charge. So, the reason that we don't seem to fit in is because Creator likes simple folks. He has chosen us, and that's why others might not care for us so much. If you ever feel guilt from following your people's traditions in regards to your Spirituality, remember these words from the Bible;

I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. John 10: 16

We may be from "Another Pen". like the Magi. We might have different ways of praying and worshiping the Creator of all. But Creator still thought enough of us that he sent his son Jesus, who accepts and loves all of us misfits whether we be Red, White, Yellow, Black or even Green (Creator may have another pen on Mars). Jesus accepts and loves all of us misfits. And as misfits, we must learn not to judge others, who's ways are different from ours. Since Creator made this world with so many different, diverse groups of people, plants and animals, there must be room for others ways, as well as our own.

