

## **Sanctified Outhouse - A Twentieth Century Burning Bush (2-23-08)**

Sterley, Texas was an average rural community and almost every house came equipped with an outhouse. Although outhouses were similar, each had its own personality because of its size, shape or an occasional color.

Everyone who has used an outhouse will recall the visual, auditory, kinesthetic and gustatory memories clearly etched into our brain. For the benefit of non-Sterleyites, those words mean that we recall what we saw, heard, felt and smelled during our “outback to the outhouse” excursions.

As a lad of sixteen, I made what I expected to be a typical visit to our relief station. I sat looking at the Montgomery Ward catalog, which seemed to diminish in size each day.

Suddenly I heard these very clear words, “What if God wants you to be a preacher?” I looked through the cracks to see if someone was outside talking to me. No one. Then I knew that those words came from God! God had spoken to me!

Then I experienced warmth that had nothing to do with the summer temperature. My soul seemed to be filled with what I call Holy warmth. I didn’t know that I would experience that Holy Warmth many times in my later life.

I can’t adequately describe that warmth but I wonder if Moses felt something like that when God appeared to him in the burning bush. The bush seemed to be on fire but the flames didn’t consume it. Our outhouse was not on fire, but my soul was ignited by God’s holy presence. I felt that I was glowing with his presence, but I wasn’t consumed by it. However, I was marvelously and indelibly impressed by it.

I am sure that my eyes enlarged to unbelievable proportions and I was afraid to leave the outhouse for fear that someone might think I had seen a ghost. Actually confronting a real live ghost would have been more easily explained than what I was thinking. I thought that I had just caught God in his first mistake. God was supposed to be perfect, to know everything.

And yet, if he thought I could preach—he didn’t know me very well. I was only sixteen and it was impossible that I could preach. At least, that was what I was hoping. My task now was to convince God of this fact.

I left the outhouse and walked to the bench under a large elm tree. I was in a trance-like state trying to understand what had just happened to me. I had faithfully recited prayers “to” and “at” God for many years. For the first time in my life I began to talk “with” God. I was having a conversation with God. This was intimate. This was real. I was on holy ground but God didn’t tell me to take off my shoes. My words echoed those of Moses as I offered my heart felt, but lame, excuses of age, shyness, inability to talk in front of people, lack of knowledge, and other reasons for not wanting to preach. God listened and honored my arguments. I was relieved when God went silent. He remained silent--until I was a freshman in college.

Then God overpowered my most powerful arguments with assurance that he would provide all my physical, emotional, educational and spiritual needs. He has done that and I have tried to be a voice for God for sixty-one years.

If God can sanctify and speak from an outhouse and a burning bush, don’t be surprised if he speaks to you when you least expect it. Or, perhaps, when you most need it.