

Praying for Rain 11-12-20 Southern Hospitality

By Don A. Wright

To say the Big China Virus of 2020 has caused a great deal of change would be an understatement. Covering district meetings used to mean a drive, often a rather long drive, and sitting in a meeting with others. I didn't worry if they were sick or not, most grownups know when to stay home and not to infect others. Maybe they had a cough, but I thought perhaps they were on some medication like blood pressure medicine that can make you cough. Then the virus hit.

I've only attended one meeting in person since this past March and it wasn't even one I usually attend. It was the Fresno Local Agency Formation Commission. Not driving to meetings has saved me a lot of time and gas. That was a bit of a double edged sword. My time management didn't improve much but the sheer abundance of extra non-driving hours – well, even I still got things started and occasionally wrapped up in some cases.

But I missed seeing the folks I've grown accustomed to seeing. You learn peoples' names in person. You learn the sound of their voices. This has actually been very helpful to me as I try to write about a discussion when you can't really see who's speaking on a Zoom meeting.

The Truth Will Set You Free

As time moved along we have been hearing different estimates as to the severity of the virus and differing responses. Instead of pulling together as one nation a fringe of the counterculture has ran wild with the media encouraging it. In fact media credibility has sunk so low fact checkers were brought in to back up reports. But the fact checkers are under suspicion and social media is now full on in the censorship game. Facts are being debased and emotional response elevated.

Absolute truth – the ultimate fact checker – has been replaced with relative truth. What's true for you isn't necessarily true for me – riots with buildings burning are mostly peaceful – as an example of relative truth. Another example based on emotion and not fact – one would think scientific fact; I may be a boy biologically but I feel like a girl so I'm going to compete in women's athletics.

Relative truth is a self-defeating proposition, counter to logic and therefore false. When someone makes a relative truth statement just ask them if that's true, i.e. "Is it absolutely true that truth is relative?" By the way this also works well when someone takes scripture out of



context such as, “You Christians are so judgmental.” Ask them, “It’s your judgement that I’m too judgmental?”

What does this confusion leave us with? It’s really difficult to know what to trust in the world we live in. Thankfully that’s why we have God’s word. Which brings me, finally, to my story.

Getting There From Here

Since I can work from home and home could be where my laptop and cell phone get strong signal I decided to take a trip to Louisiana by way of Oklahoma and do my remote work remotely. This is a good time of year to leave California if you cover water meetings. The water year is over, harvest is finished or close to it, districts are for the most part conducting routine maintenance and the elected folks in Sacramento are on break.

Two years ago, early in the morning on the last day of May I left Fresno County for Louisiana. By midnight I was almost to

Flagstaff, Arizona. My car ran out of power. The engine was running, you could hear the rev when I punched the gas but I was losing speed and there was no acceleration. I coasted to an offramp that lead down a hill to a dirt road about 30-miles west of Flagstaff. I couldn’t even see the freeway and it was pitch dark. I had left my little cowboy pistol at home and was feeling a bit vulnerable. Praise God my cell phone still had signal. It took a while but AAA towed me to a Meineke Muffler shop in Flagstaff and left me there around 3:00am. You may be thinking what I was thinking, a muffler shop? But it was the only AAA approved shop within my towing radius. And as it turned out there were full on mechanics and the service provided for more than just mufflers.

In Flagstaff it dipped down to freezing that night and as I was leaving California in what ended up being June by the time I was towed, and I was heading for Louisiana, I had neither dressed nor packed for freezing weather. By the time the shop opened at 7:00am I was pretty miserable.

It was transmission fluid. The folks who worked there were great. They tested all manner of postulations on why my car wouldn’t go forward or in reverse. They drained and put fresh fluid in my transmission and off I went. I now carry a blanket in the car at all times. I intend to always carry a blanket in any future vehicle I may own.

I left for this latest trip on the first Friday of November and made my way to Oklahoma by Saturday. Had a wonderful visit with my family. My father is 85 years old and looks more like an old Indian Chief every time I see him. I got to meet my brother in law for the first time. His name is also Don. So is my dad’s name as I’m a junior. My stepmom is named Dawn. We all



go by Don or Dawn which all sounds like Don. So my sister Melissa got to be the odd one. I can tell you the conversations were interesting. It reminded me of the time I worked on remodeling a restaurant in Clovis with a crew with two Dons, two Johns and two Rons. With the power tools and hammering it got a little confusing at times.

After a blessed, soul restoring visit I left Oklahoma City for Lafayette, Louisiana. I tried a different route (I'll roll the dice on new routes; I've got my blanket with me.) After Paris, Texas I went through Texarkana and wound up in Arkansas where I understand there is one of those crazy old laws like we have in California where's it's illegal to shoot a whale from a moving automobile. In Arkansas it is illegal to pronounce the name of that fair and bountiful state Arkansas. Only Ark-ansaw will do.



Meat Pies & Battery Fries

My route had me entering Shreveport from the north on I-49 instead of poking her in the ribs from the west on I-20 as I have done in the past. About halfway between Shreveport and Alexandria is Natchitoches, in the northern part of the state. Named after the Natchitoches tribe it is the oldest city in the state. It was established in 1714 as part of French Louisiana and is a beautiful town with antebellum architecture and European flavor to its layout. The Cane River runs through the middle. Natchitoches is home to Northwestern State University of Louisiana and Lasyone's Meat Pie Kitchen.

I've been telling who'll ever listen you can give a Cajun a piece of tree bark and an old boot, providing they have rice and cayenne pepper they'll cook you up a fine meal. But that's down south. So when my wife asked me to stop at Lasyone's and bring home some meat pies I was a bit surprised. I'm not saying the Cajun are arrogant about their food but they are deservedly proud. Well, alright they can be arrogant about their food but again deservedly so and even more reason to question; why the importation of delicacies from such northern climes? Northern Louisiana is Southern and but Southern Louisiana is more French.

As you might expect getting from the interstate to the historic downtown section of Natchitoches to Lasyone's on a traffic grid 300-years old and resembles a pot of boiled spaghetti dropped on the kitchen floor was a bit of a challenge even with GPS; which thinks I'm still in Oklahoma City and kept trying to give the 557 mile route to the restaurant.

By the time I parked across the street from the restaurant I was tired and had a headache. I'd been up since 3:00am, I was hungry, sleepy and cranky. I didn't really want to get off the freeway as it was only another hour and half to home but I did because, well, my wife is sweet

and she asked me to. Also, they had shrimp and grits which is right up there in my four or five favorite foods.

After only a half hour or so wait I had a big bag of food to take home. My car wouldn't start. I called AAA and was immediately put on hold with an announcement that due to higher than normal call volume there could be an extended wait. Really? One o'clock on a Monday and a nation-wide roadside service with more than a century of experience was taken off guard by a large amount of unexpected phone calls? I was really getting in a bad mood now.

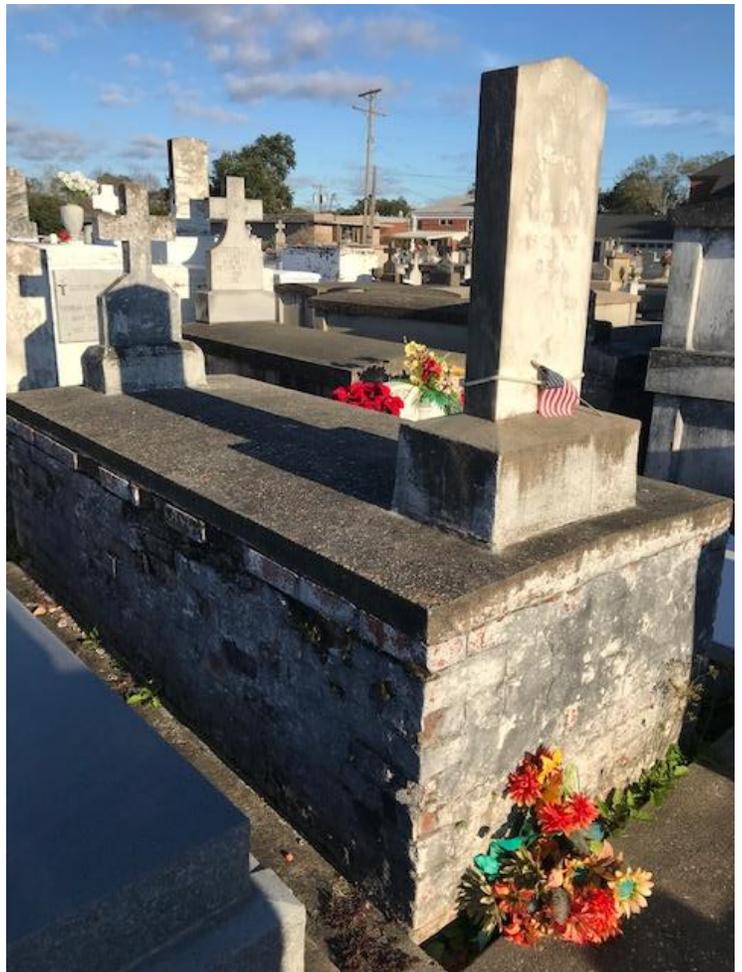
I found a set of jumper cables behind the seat so while I listened to low-fi on-hold music – the kind that sounds like ear-pudding – a man who had traveled from Texas to purchase meat pies (I guess they're that good) gave me a jump. We tried but we just couldn't get her started. I thanked him and went back to restaurant to get directions to the closest auto parts store. It was only a mile and half so I started walking.

Entertaining Strangers

About halfway to the Auto Zone while crossing a bridge on the Cane River AAA answered. The phone showed I'd been on hold for about half hour. Also, while it wasn't hot by our standards, lower 80s, the humidity was melting me. Sticky, throbbing headache, sleepy, tired, hungry; my attitude was poor. While I know I could have been far worse to that hapless lady from AAA I also know I could have been better. She told it would be at least two hours before a tow truck could get there. Since I could drive home in less time if the problem was the battery and I got a new one I almost told her to cancel but I didn't.

Within sight of the Auto Zone a red, four wheel drive GMC crew cab pulled up next to me. A man jumped out of the passenger seat, got in the back and the driver said I looked like I needed a ride. Even though it was broad daylight and neither of the men looked any crazier than anyone else – mid-thirties, clean cut, not covered in tattoos – I was once again feeling a bit vulnerable. My little cowboy pistol was in a traveling safe cabled to my car back at the restaurant.

I'm not going to say I was scared, even if I was I'm not going to say it. But I'm 2,000 miles from home in a place surrounded by swamps and tall trees that prevent one from seeing the horizon which in itself is disorienting. I wasn't hitch hiking, I don't know these guys and they're



offering me a ride. What, out of the kindness of their hearts? How did they know I needed a ride? There were some red flags raised.

Before leaving California my mother prayed for a safe trip. Before leaving Oklahoma my dad and mom prayed for a safe trip. My wife prayed daily for a safe trip. I prayed for a safe trip. I was praying as I walked to the parts store. I prayed the battery would be the only problem and that perhaps they had a parts delivery that would take them downtown I could catch a ride so I wouldn't have to carry a 12-volt battery a mile and half while walking in cowboy boots. Peace came and visited me. I got in the truck with two men I didn't know in a town I'd never been to before.



The men, Will Fluitt and Kyle Guilliams asked me, “You still want to go to Auto Zone? There are other parts stores we can take you to.” I said yes.

I asked them how they knew I needed some help. Will, the driver, said his wife was at Lasyone's ordering lunch and she overheard me ask directions to a parts store and saw me take off on foot. She called and told him to help me. He said she told him I'd be afoot and probably the only one looking like a Texas cowboy walking towards Auto Zone. Which was pretty much true. They don't expect Californians to wear cowboy hats so she thought I was from Texas.

They drove me to the store. I bought a battery, some pliers and terminal cleaner. They drove me back to my car and helped me get the new battery installed and made sure the car started before going wherever it was they went.

On the way from the store to my car I asked them if they were Christians. They are. As it turns out Will owns First Psalms Construction of Natchitoches and based on character alone I'd highly recommend the for any of your repair, remodeling or new construction needs. Although I don't think they'll travel out of state. Google them and find out.

I also asked Will if I could give him some gas money for helping me and being as he was sharing Christ he said no. I understand and respect that. One of the St. Francis' was quoted as saying, “Always be witnessing, and sometimes talk.” Will and Kyle were witnessing to me in a powerful way. Psalm one says those who do not walk with the wicked or stand with sinners or hang out with mockers and who delight in the law of the Lord – “That person is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf will not wither – whatever they do prospers.” Psalms 1:3.

Before they left Will advised me to go back to the parts store and get my alternator checked. My instinct wanted to get back on the highway and head south but one of the things I pray for each day is wisdom and humility. I pray for the wisdom to recognize God's will for me.

I pray for humility so I will follow His will. I've spent a good part of my life taking the wheel and running things into the ditch. I was humbled by Will and Kyle's kindness and so took good advice when offered. Not only did I get my core charge returned I left with peace of mind knowing my alternator was in good shape and the new battery was the cure.

A Matter of Trust

As I left Natchitoches southbound I realized my headache was gone and my energy restored. I don't know exactly why on a 2,000 mile trip my battery suddenly and without warning stopped working at a restaurant where Mrs. Fluit was buying lunch. Why wasn't Psalms One Construction in the midst of a job at that time of the day? There was hurricane damage that far north and these guys are in demand. (Just to close a part of this story when I was about 10-minutes from home the AAA tow truck driver called and apologized for running so late but he'd be by to get me in an hour and a half. I thanked him and told him there would be no need.)

We all know God works in mysterious ways. It'd be easy to speculate He had me breakdown in Natchitoches because if I hadn't stopped I would have been in an accident or who knows, maybe Will or Kyle might have had something bad happened to them if they weren't off helping me? I believe our Lord is in control and does in fact know the very number of hairs on our heads and knows how to give good gifts to His children. I don't think He moves us around like chess pieces and I don't believe each of our choices reverberate out of control like some Chinese puzzle game.

What I do know is I was blessed by brothers obeying Jesus' command to love one's neighbor as we love ourselves. I was blessed to find myself in the company of others who know where the real reward comes from. And I was blessed by growing in my faith as God showed me again who it is I can trust – Him. And that is the moral of this rambling story I'm trying to tell; we can't trust in the things of this world not even our own understanding. Only our Lord Jesus Christ is worthy of our trust.

