

“It gets hot and breaks”

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“Pleasers”

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A church couple tried to sabotage their pastor because he didn't fit their standards. They were a couple easily offended. What's the cure for not being offended? Don't take offense. Eventually, this couple tried to split the congregation, which could have happened. She was both Deacon and church organist. He was both Trustee and church custodian. They, masters of passive aggression and rumor-mongering, believed they'd cow everyone else. This is how they chose to spend their days.

Session (the congregation's governing board) tried to ignore the problem. They finally addressed it. The elders spoke with them, trying to placate them. The pastor spoke with them. That didn't placate them. They didn't want to be placated. Session teetered, until one of the elders finally blurted: “We're not going to be held hostage – we've been as fair as possible.”

Good line. I've borrowed it since. Liberation arrived when I realized I was not in the business to please people, but to be fair, to be reasonable. It's not as if it's our responsibility to make others happy. You can't anyway. Happiness, like love, is a choice. You can cultivate the conditions, but it's up to them to choose to be happy. Or not.

Another friend laughed about his first pastorate when a parishioner summoned him after worship to come and speak with her. “Pastor,” she began, “you're a fine preacher but I simply can't stand that beard of yours.” My friend went home, prayed about it, and decided since it bothered her so much, he would shave off his beard. Come next Sunday she approached him. “Oh, thank you, I'm so glad you shaved. Now, about that moustache...”

Good luck rushing around trying to please everyone. Whose favor do you seek? Whose approval do you need? This rookie pastor, fortunately, learnt early on the importance about not worrying about pleasing my congregation. I learnt I never would, never could. Plus, it's parasitic. How could I succeed when desperate for their approval? Should we be courteous and civil? Yes. Loving? Yes. Sincere? Yes. Kind? Yes. Trustworthy? Yes. Conscientious? Yes. Fair? Yes. Just? Yes. Currying favor? No.

I caught the movie “The Big Country” last Sunday, starring Gregory Peck. Peck plays a sea captain affianced to the daughter of a Texas cattle baron. Peck's character doesn't play by cowboy rules, refusing to appease them. Eventually, his refusal to fit their regulations gets to where his fiancée, her father, and cowhands regard him a coward.

His fiancée is ashamed of him: “Don't you care what people think of you?” He replies: “I'm not responsible for what people think, only for what I am.”

One scene at the debut party captures Peck's attitude. A prideful Texas rancher greets Peck's character. “Mr. McKay, how do you like this country?” “I like it very much.” “Did you ever see anything so big?” “Yes.” “You have? What?” “A couple of oceans.”

This smacks of when down-home folks start bragging about small town values. What? Are small town values superior to big city values? Talk about elitist snobbery.

Congregations love it when we dare remind them that their pastor isn't their employee. I had this go-around with a church which kept instructing their pastor what he should do. They even floated the idea of giving him a commission for each new member. Boy, did Session get miffed when I declared: "He's not your employee. This ain't widgets." Pastors don't work for the congregation. They work to please Jesus, with the congregation. Sadly, some pastors need to be mascots. Some pastors become pastors because, painfully insecure, they need to be loved and appreciated. Have you ever been involved in a church?

What happens when you bend a metal coat hanger this way and that way, that way and this way? It heats up and breaks.

The former director of the Columbia/Montour Women's Center taught us their motto: Choices not solutions. She helped us refocus the Gate House ministry. How can we make good choices so we will solve our problems, maybe even transform problems into blessings? Choices. Here's mature and unselfish personal and social responsibility.

O' MAGA saboteurs, how sad. What a waste. Stop whimpering. Stop grouping like zombies. Are you so busy being miserable, offended, angry, emotionally insecure, that you've forgotten how to choose happiness, hope, confidence? What legacy are you cultivating? Why should we choose to let you heap your displeasure on us? What are you bringing to your living? Desperate and needy Donald: pull on big boy pants.