

Editorial: Give life your best

February 7, 2013

For a minute or two, I felt like an archaeologist—exploring artifacts and interpreting their meaning.

But instead of digging ancient cities in the Holy Land, excavating Mayan ruins or exploring European caves, all I had to do was wear my best black suit and place my hands in my pockets.

My archaeological expedition occurred as I walked out of the sanctuary at Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, where Joanna and I attended the memorial service for our longtime friend Charlotte Wingfield.



Editor Marv
Knox

Since I was a little boy—when my preacher-daddy paid me 25 cents a week to straighten the hymnals and gather up all the worship bulletins and tissues left in the pews of our little church—I just haven't been able to leave litter in God's house. Maybe it's because I revere the sanctity of worship spaces. Or maybe it's also because I don't want another preacher's kid to work that hard for a quarter.

Whatever the reason, I instinctively folded the funeral program in half and slid it into the inside breast pocket of my jacket.

Lowering my hands, I felt something rigid in the lower-left outside pocket. I reached in and pulled out the backings of two nametags with “#13” neatly printed on each of the pieces of waxed paper. And I remembered we dined at Table 13 when we attended a fancy banquet last fall.

By then, I was curious, so I explored the lower-right outside pocket. Sure enough, I turned an archaeological trifecta when my fingers found two stale mints, the remains of some wedding sometime, somewhere.

“So, this is my ‘good’ suit,” I realized. “It’s the one I pull out of the closet when it’s time to dress up.”

In my world, dressing up apparently means attending funerals, fancy banquets and weddings.

For much of my adult life, I didn’t own a “good” suit. That’s not to say my closet didn’t hold some nice suits. I just couldn’t afford to set one aside to be the “good” suit for funerals, fancy banquets and weddings.

Back then, I wore suits and ties six days a week—to the office Monday through Friday and to church on Sunday. I owned several suits and a few blazers, and I rotated them through my closet, almost always selecting the one whose turn was “next.”

Some people decry the formality of that era. But I always thought wearing suits every day simplified life. In the morning as I dressed for work, the only item I needed to choose was my tie. Since the six-day-per-week cycle taxed my suit selection, I didn’t have the luxury of setting one aside as special or good or fancy. They comprised a functional, working wardrobe.

Now, styles have changed, and I rarely wear suits to work. Nice slacks and button-up shirts are plenty adequate most days. And I don’t always wear a suit to church, either. In fact, except for when I help serve the Lord’s Supper, I can’t pinpoint a rationale for choosing to wear or not to wear a

coat and tie to church.

Before Charlotte's memorial service, if you asked me if I had a "good" suit, I would have told you no. But my pockets provided repositories of artifacts that proved otherwise. In my mind, the black suit with the gray and blue pinstripes clearly is the fanciest. So, I inadvertently save it for the fanciest occasions. Like funerals, banquets and weddings.

That evening, as I stood in my closet and hung up that suit, I wondered if it's a metaphor for how I live my life.

Do I wear different personas on different occasions? Do I bring out my "best" self only on special occasions or for certain people? Do I hold part of me in reserve except when I decide the person or situation merits all of me?

Our challenge as Christians is to live thoroughly consistent, authentically integrated lives. To be the same person in private as in public. To treat all people equally and well. To apply the lessons of faith to all areas of life. To expect more of self than of others. To work hard and give a full day's labor for a day's pay. To discern to when rest, to play, to rejuvenate. To worship God in all phases and areas and situations of life.

Think how different the world would be—how our homes and our churches and our communities would be—if Christians lived consistent, holy lives.

A prophet of old provided wise counsel: "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

Jesus admonished: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27).

Those are guiding goals for each day, each moment. After all, the Lord and others deserve our best.