

A PREZ RELEASE from AGTS

*Monthly commentary from the President of the
Assemblies of God Theological Seminary*

A Stick of Black Jack Gum November 2003

It's almost Thanksgiving Day here in the U.S. We Americans begin to salivate quite early in anticipation of tables loaded with all our favorite Thanksgiving foods. We dutifully experience turkey, our special preferred stuffing, the questionable variations of sweet potatoes with melted marshmallows on top, the traditional pumpkin pie and the prayers that are prayed by folks who obviously only pray once a year.

Let me give you another image to consider.....a stick of Black Jack gum. No, I'm not trying to start a new tradition, but I had a great experience the other day that just got me thinking. I was in a convenience store to get a cup of coffee and at the check out stand was boxes of candy and gum products that I didn't even know were still produced. And there right in front of me.... Black Jack gum! I couldn't believe my eyes.

When I was a small boy my grandfather Jake Daniels was a person that had so much influence on me. He was a simple farmer that I shadowed every summer I was growing up. Fun was defined in very simple ways, like swimming in an irrigation ditch and pigging out on sweet corn from the garden. But once a week we would go to town to shop and have a "cold one." (That's A&W root beer for the uninitiated reader.) But the biggest treat of all was when my Granddad would buy me a package of Black Jack gum. That strong licorice taste was wonderful. It lingered in my mouth and made me feel so grown up. Just the name Black Jack sounded so strong and manly.

When I saw that box of Black Jack the other morning I grabbed a fistful of packages. I popped a stick in my mouth and what do you know? As Yogi Berra would say, "It was déjà vu all over again!" After I tasted that gum I hadn't had for at least 35 years, I drifted into some wonderful thoughts that I think are appropriate for this Thanksgiving season.

I'm grateful for a heritage of *sturdy simplicity* that I have been bequeathed.

Sturdy in that my foundations were demonstrated to me concretely by people like Jake Daniels who believed that the God he served was a present tense God. The Creator God was vital to my forebears because He regularly showed up in their lives in very tangible ways. They trusted God today because He had demonstrated His trustworthiness in the past.

Simple in that hard work was not scorned and substance mattered a whole lot more than image. What kept food on the table and meaning in life was not a matter of slick image. Consistent effort to make a living on a farm teaches one to value concrete results and be very

grateful about the tangible and substantive harvest that necessitates hard work and most importantly the goodness of the God of Harvest.

I'm grateful for a heritage of *spiritual vibrancy*.

Spiritual in that God was not an object of mere intellectual discussion nor just an opportunity to demonstrate my American-ness with a few platitudes mouthed for public consumption. Spiritual was a daily relationship with God that started every day with prayer and reading from the Bible. So engrained was this dimension of Granddad Daniels life, that though a stroke, late in life, took away his capability to converse, every morning you could still hear his strong voice lifting praise to God in perfect understandable words.

Vibrant in that my heritage is one that rejects a sacred-secular dichotomy that culture wishes to impress on me. I affirm that in the middle of a world where I feel that sometimes I don't count and where all words seem to be emptied of meaning, my God knows the language of my heart and we can converse intimately. God's power and presence is available every day and what is visible is not the sum total of the reality that governs my life.

So with apologies to Garrison Keillor for my attempt at providing you the Thanksgiving news from Lake Wobegon, I want to say I am grateful at the Thanksgiving season for a heritage of sturdy simplicity and spiritual vibrancy. I'm also grateful that there is still some sanity in the world. How do I know that? I just had a stick of Black Jack gum!!

Byron D. Klaus, President
Assemblies of God Theological Seminary

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