

God, Life, and Everything "Scout Sunday"

Last Sunday was Scout Sunday.
Except it wasn't.
Next Sunday is really Scout Sunday.
But not for us.
Got that?

Let me make it clearer. Last Sunday, we had about 20 (giver or take) Boy Scouts and their leaders from Troop 80 join us for church because our church sponsors the troop. Technically speaking, next Sunday, February 8, is the official Scout Sunday, but they all wanted to be in their home churches that day. So the troop decided to come as a group this past Sunday.

Cool, huh?

Now, you may not be familiar with Scout Sunday. I'm here to fill you in.

Since the middle of the 1940s, Scout Sunday has been an official celebration for the Boy Scouts of America. It celebrates the founding of BSA on February 8, 1910. Scout Sunday was started in houses of worship in part because Scouts have in their oath a promise to do their "duty to God." This is an active reminder. It's also a great PR move, making churches, synagogues, and other houses of worship more aware of the Scouts.

I mean think about it, where do many, if not most Boy Scout Troops meet? Yes! In church parish halls. My son, who was not a member of Troop 80 (He wouldn't be in a troop at the church where his dad was the pastor because that was just too weird!) nevertheless met at a church - Troop 37 at the Hyde Park United Methodist Church.

So, Scout Sunday has a little bit of old fashioned sucking up involved in it. But so what? It's nice.

And I have to tell you, it really was nice seeing those boys and their leaders sitting up at the front of the church (where nobody really wants to sit). I decided in my sermon that I'd talk directly to them, and it was kind of fun. It also forced me to keep my preaching to a level that would not totally bore an 11-year-old boy to death. They all seem to have survived.

In some churches, they have special liturgies for Scout Sunday - prayers, statements, interpretive dance - I don't know. For us, we just greeted them and let them know we were glad they were there.

After the service, the boys hosted our coffee hour. This is an important time in the life of the church because we get to spend casual time together, chatting, catching up, and greeting new folks. We actually had some other visitors that day from churches in New Rochelle and Harlem, so there were plenty new faces to go around that day!

Let me say that I have had - and to a degree still have - some issues with the Boy Scouts. They are slow in coming around to accept gays. They are even slower in opening their doors to those who have no religious faith - even though Boy Scout camping trips are one of the biggest things to keep boys out of church!

On the other hand, there is so much good that can come from the scouts that I don't want kids to lose out on it. I just want it to be open to more. I've heard it called a para-military organization, but that's not really my experience of it. The whole salute,

pledge, patriotic part is not for everyone (and my oaths are to God alone), but what a child can learn is tremendous.

There's respect for the environment. Respect for each other. There are leadership skills taught, not to mention a slew of skills from fire building to website design. I like that kids do get out in the woods, do camp, do learn how to tie knots, and do learn how to discuss a planned project with an adult one minute and teach younger kids a new skill the next. One of my proudest moments as a scout parent wasn't when our son earned his Eagle rank. It was when parents of a few younger boys told me how patient our son had with theirs, how he had not given up on them when they were ready to give up, and how he taught them well.

So, I really liked seeing all those boys at the church last Sunday. There's good stuff happening in that group. Maybe this Sunday, if you see some kid in a scout uniform, you can say, "I'm glad you're here."