

AColyte

April 2019

A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things at Austin College

Scottish Pigs

on the



Honky Tonk Road

Not that it matters, but that photo really was taken in Scotland.

AColyte

A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things at Austin College

Rev. John Williams, Ph.D., Editor

900 N. Grand Ave.

Suite 61647

Sherman, TX 75090

903.813.2220

jwilliams@austincollege.edu

**CONGRATULATIONS
To THE 2019-2020
SALLIE MAJORS
RELIGIOUS LIFE INTERNS**

David Anderson
Patrick Blasingame
Santos Botello
Lois Bronaugh
Spencer Dirk
Emma Page
Addie Pederson
Bridget Tolle

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

March 15, 2019
American Airlines Center
Dallas Stars vs. Vegas Golden Knights
Second Intermission

*God help me, I love it out here so much
On the Honky Tonk Road
--Walt Wilkins*

*If we can't make a little good noise
Tell me what are we doing here?
--John Gorka*

...so, anyway, there I was...watching the Dallas Stars lose an important game to the Vegas Golden Knights.

In the intermission between the second and third periods I received a text message from **Josh Robinson**. Josh is an Austin College alumnus from the Class of 2000 and an old friend of mine. He was in my last church youth group before I came to work for Austin College in 1993. He participated in dozens of **ACTivators** events while he was at AC and was one of the first class of **Sallie Majors Religious Life Interns**.

After graduating from AC, Josh completed a Masters of Divinity degree at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

He is now pastor of Hope Presbyterian Church in Austin, TX.

So that's who was texting me.

In the text, Josh asked me if I would be interested in coming to his church on April 13 to talk about "Stewardship of Self."

I was immediately pretty interested.

I like Josh.

I like Austin.

I like talking to Presbyterians.

I know some stuff.

I've never minded being the center of attention.

But it was the next part of Josh's text that really sealed the deal for me.

Josh told me that, before I gave my talk, singer-songwriters **Walt & Tina Wilkins** would spend an hour performing some of their songs at the church.

I'm a pretty big Walt Wilkins fan.

I've been listening to his music for years. I've written about him in the *AColyte*, and seen him perform a couple times. Last summer in Denison he played his song *Poetry* for Linnea and me on our 30th wedding anniversary.

So I told Josh that I'd definitely be interested in coming down, hanging with him and Walt & Tina, and talking about "Stewardship of Self."

After the hockey game, we didn't come back to Sherman like we usually do.

Instead, we drove from Dallas to Granbury, TX so we could go the next day to see my niece **Amanda Williams Ware** in the Granbury Theater Company's production of *Mamma Mia*.



So, after I accepted Josh's invitation and drove to Granbury with my family, and started thinking about "Stewardship of Self" and the music of Walt & Tina Wilkins, I found myself thinking about 3 things.

1. Scottish Pigs

Naturally, the first thing I thought of when I was thinking about "Stewardship of Self" was Scottish pigs.

Seriously

Here's why:

The first animal that the nomadic clans of ancient Scotland domesticated were pigs.

It made sense.

Pigs thrived in Scotland. They could find plenty to eat. They were hearty and prospered in the rough and rugged Scottish terrain.

The clan members figured out that it was good to have pigs around. They were a good source of meat, their hides and other parts were useful, and they actually gained weight (meat) as they traveled.

The ancient Scots eventually developed a whole economy based on pigs.

Everybody wanted to have some pigs around.

But pigs are a little bit of trouble to keep. It takes some time, space, and energy to care for pigs, and individual families eventually figured out that – although it was great to

have pigs around as a source of meat and hides – they also had a lot of other things to do to take care of themselves.

So the clans decided that the most efficient thing for them to do would be to keep everybody's pigs together.

They would choose one person to care for everybody's pigs. That way the families would be free to do the other things they needed to do to survive, while knowing that their pigs were being well cared for.

That was a good idea, but only if the person in charge of everybody's pigs could be trusted to take good care of those pigs even though they didn't ultimately belong to them.

Each clan needed to find someone who was responsible, honest, trustworthy, and dependable. So they would identify an exemplary member of their community and put them in charge of everybody's pigs.

That person was placed in charge of the area where the pigs were kept.

They became the **"warden"** of the **"sty"**: the **STY WARDEN**

The phrase "Sty Warden" is where we get the words "Steward" and "Stewardship." So whenever we talk about "stewardship" in the context of our life together, we're essentially saying that we should all be the kind of people the whole clan could trust with their pigs.

And that's why I thought about Scottish pigs when I thought about "Stewardship of Self" after that hockey game.

Remember that, we'll get back to it later.

[Editor's Note:

The name of the only royal family
that was unique to Scotland—
the last name of Mary Queen of Scots
and Kings James I & II and Charles I & II—
was "Stuart."
Same root: "Sty Warden"
History is so cool.]

2. Honky Tonk Road

The second thing I thought about as I was driving to Granbury with my family after that hockey game was **Walt Wilkins** music.

Years ago, singer/songwriter **Kevin Welch** told me he thought I'd like Walt's music and especially its spiritual and theological themes.

And Kevin was right. I really do appreciate and enjoy Walt & Tina's music. And the theological and spiritual themes are interesting and engaging.

There's first-rate theology in a lot of Walt's music--

- The kind that asks as many questions as it claims to answer
- But approaches the questions – and faces the world – with a posture of hopefulness, assurance, and faith.

There are several of Walt's songs that make me think of particular passages from the Bible.

Read these verses from Psalm 8:

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens...
When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?
Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.

In *Watch It Shine*, Walt sings:

*They say there's iron in these mountains
And in bone and skin and mud
They say iron only comes from stars
So stars are in my blood
Red and blue and purple
The shadows grow and fade
Spreading all directions
From where it all was made.*

Read these verses from Psalm 19:

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

In *Poetry* Walt sings

*I can't explain a blessed thing
Not a falling star or a feathered wing
Or how a man in chains has the strength to sing
Just one thing is clear to me
There's always more than what appears to be
And, when the light's just right, I swear I see
Poetry*

I like Walt's stuff.

But that's not the part of Walt's music I was thinking about that night on the way to Granbury. I actually only thought of one line from one of his songs – the last line of "Honky Tonk Road"

*"God help me, I love it out here so much,
on the Honky-Tonk Road"*

That one line suggests a kind of self-reflection that is essential for us all as we think about "Stewardship of Self."

It comes at the end of a fun song about the highs and lows and peaks and valleys of traveling around and playing music in bars.

According to the song, some of it is exhilarating and huge fun, and some of it is just not.

But that last line makes it clear that the singer, Walt, fully accepts and embraces that that's what he does, what he loves, who he is.

You can find a lot of that kind of self-reflection in Walt's music – in songs like *Gypsy Line*, *Going Up to Ft. Worth*, *Big Shiny Cars*, *The Songs I've Sung*, and *Honky Tonk Road*.

Those are all songs in which Walt sings about what he does, why he loves it, and why it might matter.

On the surface, they just sound like fun little ditties about how much fun it is to travel around a play music for people (Nanci Griffith used to call them “Lifestyle-Justification songs”).

But they actually represent a significant degree of self-reflection.

Don’t let him sneak that theology by you – those are essentially vocational discernment songs. They are reflections on how to use the gifts that he has received.

Self-reflection is an important component of the Stewardship of Self.

It’s important for us all to be disciplined about thinking occasionally about

- What we do
 - Both professionally and beyond that
- Why we love it, and
- Why it might matter.

2.5 So let’s pause here for a second to get our bearings:

As we think about “Stewardship of Self”, we should think about Scottish pigs because they are where we get the word “stewardship”.

Thinking about “Stewardship of Self” means thinking about our lives as gifts from God

Psalm 100:3 says
*Know that the Lord is God.
It is he that made us, and we are his;*

1 Peter 4:10 says
*Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God,
serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.*

Those verses suggest that we each have the responsibility to be good stewards of the gift of our particular lives and

to use the gift of our life
to serve one another

And as we do that we should follow Walt's example in "Honky Tonk Road" by thinking about

- What we do (both professionally and beyond that)
- Why we love it if we love it (and why not if we don't), and
 - Why it might matter
- Why it might be good for the world for us to have the gifts we have?
- How can it be good news for the rest of the world that we have the gifts we do?

So that's where I got "**Scottish Pigs on the Honky-Tonk Road.**"

Those are 2 things I thought of on the road from Dallas to Granbury.
But I thought of a third image as well.

3. John Calvin's Spectacles



*Just as old or bleary-eyed men
and those with weak vision,
if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume,
even if they recognize it to be some sort of
writing,
yet can scarcely construe two words,
but with the aid of spectacles
will begin to read distinctly;
so Scripture,
gathering up the otherwise confused
knowledge of God in our minds,
having dispersed our dullness,
clearly shows us the true God.*

(John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion I.vi.1)

I know – that's a little weird to throw in a John Calvin quote at my talk in Austin or in the *AColyte*, but if I don't quote Calvin once a month they'll kick me out of the union.

Actually, I think that's a really useful image.

Basically, what Calvin is saying there is that – if we look at the world through the lens of the Bible – some things come into focus.

I think it's a great way to talk about why it's good for us to study the Bible together. When we study the Bible together some aspects of our life and our world come into focus. When we do that we can get a clearer picture of what matters most as we try to live faithfully and be good stewards of the gifts of our lives.

So all of that is just a really long introduction so I can say this:

I WANT TO WRAP UP OUR CONVERSATION ON THE STEWARDSHIP OF SELF BY ENCOURAGING EACH OF YOU TO LOOK AT YOUR REFLECTION IN THE MIRROR THROUGH THE LENS OF SIX DIFFERENT PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE.

I believe these Bible passages should affect what you see when you look in the mirror.

And the image of yourself that you see through those passages should inform your understanding of how you can be a good steward of the gift of your life.

Genesis 1:26-27

26 Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image,
according to our likeness..."

27 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

In his song, "Dear God," Walt asks,

*If I'm created in your image
Is this all I'll ever be?*

I think that's a good question. I know I hope and pray I won't always be this clumsy and stiff and long-winded and foolish.

But I think we should take some comfort in the biblical assurance that we are created in God's image.

When we look at ourselves through the lens of these verses from Genesis 1 we see that we are each created in God's image.

That includes you.
And Walt Wilkins.

And Josh Robinson.

And Cece O'Day.

And *me*.

All of us are created in God's image

Each of us is created in God's image.

Which means that when you look in the mirror, looking back at you is someone created in God's image--

- Someone who is essential in their distinctiveness;
- Someone who is enough;
- Someone who doesn't need to be anything other than what they are;
- Someone who is just right.

Genesis 2:19

19 So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

This verse takes place after God says "It is not good that the human should be alone" in Genesis 2:18 and before God creates Eve in Genesis 2:20.

And it's easy to overlook.

But notice that, after saying that it is not good for the human to be alone in Genesis 2:18, God starts creating other animals. But God doesn't say, "Okay, Adam – this is a porcupine and this is a kangaroo."

Instead, Genesis 2:19 says

God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them;

Adam gets to name "every living creature."

and whatever the man called every living creature, **that was its name.**

And Adam's decision stands.

This is the first suggestion in the Bible of what it might mean for the human to be created in God's image. And the suggestion is that being created in God's image means being capable of making real decisions that have real consequences; being capable of being God's partner in the ongoing process of creation.

Exodus 3:10

*So come,
I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people,
the Israelites, out of Egypt*

By the time we get to this story in Exodus 3, Moses is way out of the limelight. He was living a small, petty, very limited life with few prospects and only the most mundane, short-sighted, selfish concerns.

Remember, he killed a guy in Egypt in Exodus 2:12 and ran away so he wouldn't be caught and punished.

There's certainly no dishonor in being a shepherd, but the way Moses got himself into that situation was pretty cheap. In his efforts to avoid the Egyptian authorities – to avoid facing up to the consequences of his actions – Moses seems to have become somebody whose concerns were pretty small and pretty selfish. As Exodus 3 begins, there's not much evidence that he was worried about anything more than his immediate comfort, safety, and preservation.

I think one could argue that the worst elements of our contemporary popular culture encourage us to live with the same priorities that Moses had while he was out there chasing Jethro's sheep around:

Immediate comfort.

Safety.

Preservation.

A person who knew nothing about this country that could not be learned watching commercial television could easily conclude that we believe that the most important things about individuals are our paychecks, our credit card limits, and our status as potential consumers of prescription drugs.

I don't intend to be the guy who blames everything on "Society." And there's certainly nothing inherently wrong with comfort, safety, or preservation – with producing and consuming stuff and trying to be as healthy as possible. But when those things become the only things that we are ever concerned about, we are likely to end up with lives that are as small, petty, and mundane as Moses' life was when he encountered that burning bush.

As we get further into the story, it becomes pretty clear that God didn't have much patience with Moses' small, petty, mundane outlook.

We can see in the conversation between God and Moses in verses 10, 11, and 12 that God thought more of Moses than Moses thought of himself. In verse 10 God tells Moses, "I'm sending you to lead my people out of slavery in Egypt." And Moses says, "Who am I to do such a thing?" God replies, "I will be with you." Essentially, "I'll tell you who you are – you're my guy."

What's going on here is that God is inviting Moses to transcend his small-time, unnecessarily limited, mundane outlook.

Back in verse 5, God began the conversation with Moses by informing him that he was on holy ground. The interchange in verses 10-12 shows us what happens on holy ground. Holy ground is a place where the mundane is transcended. It is a place where individuals are invited to see themselves in more than small, unnecessarily limited, mundane terms.

God thought more of Moses than Moses thought of himself.

God thought Moses was worth the trouble.

He was ... So are you.

Psalm 139:7-10

Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

In *Here's to the Trains I Missed*, Walt sings:

*I've been a clown, I've been a fool
And I pushed on every chance
I searched far and wide trying to crawl out of God's hands*

And later

*Here's to the things I need
Bigger than me
And the moments I find myself right where I'm supposed to be*

Both Psalm 139 and “Here’s to the Trains I Missed” remind us that we remain in God’s care even when we stray or forget what matters most

They remind us that we are safe.

At the beginning of **Isaiah 43**, God tells the Israelites:

...[Y]ou are precious in my sight,
and honored,
and I love you,

A better translation of the Hebrew would be

I love y'all

because it’s a second person plural pronoun, but we definitely believe that “y’all” includes us. We’re part of that same community

1 John 3:1 says

See what love the Father has given us,
that we should be called children of God;
and that is what we are.

When we look at our reflection through the lenses of Isaiah 43 and 1 John, we see someone who is beloved looking back at us.

Finally, as we discussed above, **1 Peter 4:10** says

Like good stewards
of the manifold grace of God,
serve one another

with whatever gift each of you has received.

This brings us full circle back to the Scottish pigs.

This one verse tells us that we each need to identify, develop, and share the gifts that God has given us.

+++++

So when we look in the mirror through the lens of the Bible, we see someone looking back at us who is

- Just right,
- Capable,
- Worth the trouble,
- Safe,
- Beloved, and
- Gifted

If some of us forget that, we need to remind each other.
It's the truth about each of us.

+++++

So here's what I think about the Stewardship of Self:

- Since we're just right,
 - we should be confident and courageous;
- Since we're capable,
 - We should get busy and figure stuff out;
- Since we're worth the trouble,
 - We should be patient with ourselves and with each other;
- Since we're safe,
 - We should try not to worry;
- Since we're beloved and part of a Beloved Community,
 - We should stick together

- and be more concerned about loving each other than agreeing with each other
- And since we're gifted, we should act gifted
 - We should approach every day and every situation by thinking more about what we can offer than what we deserve to get.

+++++

One last Walt Wilkins quote:

*At the end of this life that I've been given
After the prayers and the bells have rung
I ain't afraid of where I'm going
What'll become of the songs I've sung?*

I think I know the answer.

When Walt and Tina stood up on that stage and sang their songs that day in Austin, the reason the rest of us could hear them is that

- Breath went over their vocal cords and
- Walt strummed the strings of his guitar.

Those two actions (breath over vocal cords and guitar strumming) created sound waves in the room.

Those waves vibrated our eardrums and our brains were able to receive and recognize them.

That's pretty basic Physics.

But those waves never completely stop. They get progressively smaller so our piddly ears can't keep hearing them.

But the soundwaves created by Walt's guitar and Walt & Tina's voices *never* completely go away.

Never.

So, when Walt asks "What'll become of the songs I've sung?" the answer is that they will never completely go away.

Every time he sings one of his songs, the whole world changes forever. It will never be the same again.

That's true about you, too, you know.

Every time you sing your song,
recite your poem,
write your paper,
discuss your research,
make your legal argument,
say your prayer,
speak to your patient,
teach your class,
ask your question,
share your thoughts,
ask for help,
apologize,
express gratitude,
encourage another,
or express your love
the whole world changes forever.

So sing your songs.

Make your noise.

Serve one another with whatever gift you have.

Until Next Month, I remain,
Just Another Cowboy Preacher,
Hoping You'll Check Out Some Walt Wilkins Music (if you want to),

JOHN WILLIAMS
Chaplain