

Seeds

We were on vacation in 1978 near a small town in western Maine, when a man I met at the grocery store convinced me to come to his church. Intrigued by his enthusiasm and sincerity, I brought my family the following Sunday morning. Preparing to sit down in the back pew, the small old building suddenly shook when the shaggiest steel guitar riff split the air and lit up the pulpit in a blaze of sound.

"Hello, Friend." came a sepulchral voice, as the last stunning chord drifted off, "Come, sit down in front so we can all meet you!"



My wife and kids and I stood frozen for just a second and then proceeded down the aisle to the "pew of honor," up front and right in the middle of a welcoming crowd of the faithful. In addition to the guitar man, squeezed between the

back wall and the pulpit, a teenage boy began to slam a few pretty fast block chords at the piano and a lumberjack-looking dude with a big bushy beard played ... honest to God ... a washtub bass, complete with the hinged pole and piano string. And he played it well!

The congregation numbered about 50 and they rented the former Methodist building so they could have a church according to their wishes. An elderly lady told me later at coffee she

had no use for pipe organs, paid choir directors or the other trappings of some mainline churches. The group liked their religion loud and noisy. They would not have felt comfortable, nor possibly welcome, in a sanctimonious church.

These folks were hardworking farmers and mechanics, secretaries and store clerks. Remembering that Paul the Apostle had been a tentmaker by trade, I chuckled when their leader, Bill, told me he fitted canvas on tent campers for a living. Bill took no pay. When not working, he visited the sick and tried to help anyone within grabbing distance of his large heart. He said he played steel guitar in a country band on weekends at a local road house and prayed for the patrons as they got drunk. Later in the night, as a volunteer fireman, he often attended to those dying on the roadside who he had just been praying for an hour before.

For three summers, we rented a camp near South Paris for two weeks and always visited "St. Bill and the Boys," as we called the congregation. We looked forward to our visits, because the group brought us a fresh vision of what it meant to be Christian.

The fourth summer they were gone, the church boarded up and closed.

"How sad," said my wife.
"Not really," I replied. "They were here for us. Now, they're somewhere else."

"Seeds," she said.

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