

Column – A lesson at the gas pump

The gas pump hardly seems a place for reflection, but why not? A few days ago, while filling the tank of my car and as dollars continued to climb, my eyes fell on a notice affixed to the pump listing credit cards that could be used for payment. Alongside each was the company's trademark . . . the yellow and red scallop shell for Shell, the distinctive red star for Texaco along with the familiar ones for Visa and Mastercard.

It occurred to me how powerful trademarks are and why companies go to such lengths to protect them. Among other things, they bring about immediate recognition, thus eliminating the need for a cluster of words. Beyond that, if the company has a good reputation, they instill confidence in consumers.

People don't have trademarks tattooed on their body (though some may today), but they do wear 'badges'. By badges, I mean those things that define them and facts about them a stranger quickly learns after meeting them.

These badges may include their political affiliation. You don't have to be around them too long before you discover if they are a Democrat or a Republican, and this identification does not necessarily end when they are laid to rest in the ground. I knew one family who went so far as to have a Republican elephant engraved on their loved one's tombstone. In life and in death, he was a member of the Grand Old Party (GOP).

I read somewhere that President Lyndon Johnson's mother, [Rebekah Baines Johnson](#), when introduced would say, "I'm a Baptist and a Democrat." Those were her badges.

For others it may be membership in a service club or fraternal organization. At the church where my grandmother was a member, there was a masonic emblem in a stained-glass window. Obviously, membership in this order was important to the man in whose memory this window was given.

Of course, there are many other badges people wear. For some, it is that they are veterans. They answered their country's call to serve in Germany,

Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and in so doing put their lives on the line so that future generations might enjoy freedom. Their service – quite rightly – gives them a special identity, one we all should honor and respect.

For men, it is often their profession that defines them. When you meet them, you soon learn that they are a lawyer, doctor, clergyman, banker, college professor or Indian chief. Still others – especially in today’s society – wear their sexual identity on their sleeve. This is their badge.

What about the Christian? What is to be his or her badge? Well, to be certain this person may be a Libertarian, a member of the DAR, the Sons of Confederate Veterans, a Rotarian, a renowned surgeon, a decorated war veteran or any host of other things; nevertheless, his or her chief identity must be his or her union with Christ.

The Apostle Paul puts us on the right track when he says: “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

He makes the same point when he writes: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith [faithfulness] of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

In what do YOU find your identity? No doubt each of us wear multiple badges. Nevertheless, if we are Christians, the one Paul identifies must be supreme.

There are a number of ways we do this. Some choose to wear a cross around their neck or on their lapel. That’s fine as far as it goes. The cross is indeed a universally recognized ‘trademark’ of the Christian faith. An even better one, though, is a sold-out [committed] life. “They will know us by our love” is the title of a Christian song, and so they will. Let’s strive for this badge above all others.

LORD, we beseech thee, grant thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil; and with pure hearts and minds to follow thee, the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Collect for the 19th Sunday after Trinity, Book of Common Prayer)

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