



Tiskilwa Plow Creek Boy

A column by
Rich Foss

When Phil Kauffman of rural Tiskilwa returned for a question and answer session following his one man show of The Cotton Patch Gospel last Friday night, his friends and neighbors greeted him with a standing ovation.

The play, a musical written by Harry Chapin, is based on a translation by Clarence Jordon of the Gospel according to Matthew. Jordon translated the Gospel as if it took place in Georgia.

Over the course of two hours Kaufmann performed the roles of Jesus, his disciples, and numerous other Biblical characters including Georgia Governors Herod and Pilate.

Thanks to the technology he was also the complete band for the musical. When he did a musical number, he was backed up by four Phils on a screen at the back of the stage, each playing a different musical instruments — banjo, mandolin, guitar and bass—and each dressed in a differ-

ent costume.

With all that technical wizardry there was bound to be a glitch or two but Phil gracefully adlibbed through the rough spots. What amazed me was how few glitches there were.

The power of the ancient story of Jesus, son of God, born to a virgin and parented by a couple of ordinary people (in this version he is born in Gainesville, Georgia), shines through. Like the original Gospel, there are lots of misunderstandings as people try to figure out who Jesus is. The play has both humor and pathos.

My favorite song from the play is "Going to Atlanta", a song that captures the enthusiasm of the disciples, rural Georgia folk, who think they and Jesus are going to make it big in Atlanta, the biggest city around.

Part of the song has a solo by Jesus who plaintively asks, "What has Atlanta to do with me?" While the disciples are thinking of Atlanta as being the big time, Jesus knows that it means his death. In the original gospel his death is by crucifixion, in the The Cotton Patch Gospel it is death by lynching. Like the original gospel, Jesus agonizes as he faces his death in prayer, longing for a different path but surrendering to his Father's will.

"My favorite part was the upside down song," said Sarah who accompanied me to the play. She was referring to "Turn It Around" with the chorus: "Turn it around, surprise' em a little, start shifting the ground, to get right side up, get upside down, now is the time to turn it around."

Jesus surprised a lot of

people 2000 years ago and he's still surprising us with the fresh twists on his message in Phil's one man show.

The show played last Thursday and Friday night at Willow Springs Mennonite Church in rural Tiskilwa. Next Friday and Saturday nights (April 8 and 9) the play will be at First Lutheran in Princeton. So if you missed the Tiskilwa shows it's not too late.

Phil is not only following in Harry Chapin's footsteps musically but also in terms of the cause that the play supports—hunger. On the Facebook page devoted to promoting the performances it says: "Cotton Patch Gospel musical, performed by Phillip Kaufmann. Proceeds from performances benefit local food pantries and worldwide hunger programs. The CPG Food Project is a ministry of the Willow Springs Mennonite Church, Tiskilwa IL."

My favorite scene was Phil doing a southern preacher called John the Baptizer. Like the original John the Baptist, he was an outspoken critic of religious hypocrites, "You sons of snakes..."

At times the play, like Jesus, will make you uncomfortable but it's for a good cause. Spend your \$10 to see the play at First Lutheran Church, 116 N Pleasant, Princeton, next weekend.

You'll laugh, squirm in your seat, and be moved by two men trying to be faithful to God, Jesus the son of God and Phil, a son of Tiskilwa.

As always, Bureau Valley Chief readers, you can call me at (815) 646-4264 or e-mail me at richfoss@plow-creek.org with corrections or news about Tiskilwa's past present, or future.

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