

The Mediocre Cowboy

“Only the mediocre are always at their best.” Jean Giraudoux

“The best there ever was!” he roared. “Cowboy, that is! And nobody better say different!”

The cowboy sat in a wooden roll-backed chair in the saloon, dressed in his standard cowboy attire. His worn-chaps covered faded blue jeans, and the denim-checked shirt he wore covered a torso that seemed to be held together by the cartridge belt which holstered a worn 1873 Colt Single Action Army revolver. He held an ancient deck of playing cards in his hand and was building a pyramid on the table in front of him.

The double hung doors burst open and a young man made his way to the braggart’s table. “The herd is spread from here to kingdom come. The boss wants you to come round up all the mavericks before we set out on the spring trail drive.

“You tell him that I rounded up sixteen of those little varmints two weeks ago. And half of them are in the corral. And half of them may be branded. You just tell him that!” He turned back to his card game as the young man ran out.

The room was awash with onlookers, for this man was known as a man not to be reckoned with. There were twenty two notches on the handle of his pistol, one for each man he had killed in a fair fight.

A couple of hours later another messenger arrived. This was a weathered cowpoke, the ramrod of the herd.

“Hey, Slim! The boss says the south fence is down, and cows are trampling Miss Minerva’s turnip patch. There’s gonna be nothing left if we don’t get over there soon!”

“You tell the boss that I may get there the day after tomorrow. I got important business in town, and I don’t want to be bothered by no old schoolmarm that don’t matter to me nohow!”

The door slammed as the ramrod took off running, his spurs jingling as he ran.

It was getting on close to suppertime. The next messenger was in a panic.

“Boy we are in real trouble now. We heard you was a gunhand, but we never seen that pistol come out of the holster since you was hired. We got rustlers that are trying to take the cattle we have left! We really need you to come right this second!

“Well, I never shot nobody that didn’t shoot first. Tell the boss I could help, but I think that’s a boring fight, and not worth the trouble to saddle up for. Tell him to call me when he’s got something worth my trouble.”

Same result. Doors slam.

Finally, as the cowpoke was getting ready to head to the hotel, the doors swung open again. It was the trail boss himself.

“Well, hey Boss!” What’s up? You need somethin’?”

“Nope. Just wanted to tell you you’re fired!”

“Fired? What for? I didn’t do nothing!”

“That’s why you’re fired! You didn’t do nothin’!” The dust trail boss turned on his heel and left a surprised, not quite mediocre, in fact useless, cowboy looking at his cards.

He stumbled to his feet, looked over at the church across the street, then said to himself, “Nope. They do less over there than I do!”

Cowboys are known as hard working people. They work from long before daylight and don’t find their bedroll till long after dark. Churches are often filled with people who have grown satisfied with a pale imitation, a mediocre version of what the church is supposed to be.

We are born to round up desperate and needy mavericks who would be lost unless we go look for them. When we find them, they should be baptized, or branded, so that all know that they are an important part of God’ herd.

When the cows get out of the fence, it’s a danger for them and the community. They might get lost and die. They might fall in with wrong crowd.

They might even think we don't care. But we do and we must go after them and all the ones who are looking to find a spiritual home. It's up to you and me to find them.

And when spiritual rustlers come around, it's no time to play cards and ignore orders to save those critters. There are so many rustlers which can steal them away. Activities which seem nice at the time, but have no spiritual value. Laziness. Or even indifference. They all tempt us to be mediocre Christians at best.

“For most of us,” writes John Ortberg, “the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it. We will just skim our lives instead of actually living them.”

What a tragedy! Or an opportunity! God waits to make the first five words said by the cowboy above true of us.