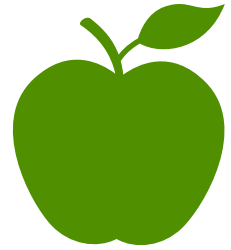


Rumor Has It -- A Modern Day Parable

Inspired by Matthew 16:13-20



Roger made his final sweep through the main hall of the old high school. He turned and went into the front office area to finish the job of keeping every inch of this place clean and sanitized. The janitor is generally the last one to leave the building, but he didn't mind. In fact, he loved this time of quiet to process the day and clear his mind. During the day these halls are filled with teens, backpacks, laughter and chatter.....oh, lots of chatter!

The students loved Roger, and Roger loved the students. But, none of them actually knew his name. They all called him "Crook" because he had a funny little crooked smile to match his funny little crooked walk. He was small and wiry with a giant heart, and he genuinely cared for these kids. He took great pride in his often thankless work of providing a clean and safe space for their young minds to grow. Most of them took it for granted, as teenagers are usually preoccupied with many other things. If he happened to be working in the hallway when the bell rang, it didn't take long for Crook to be swallowed up into the crowd. Hundreds of teens hurriedly meandered up and down the corridors busily trying to catch up on the latest drama in their lives -- it looked and sounded like someone cracked open a hornets nest! The noisy chatter softened only when a teacher or administrator walked by. Then, the conversations became a guarded whisper with suspicious looks, as if their lives would be totally ruined if an adult overheard. Funny thing was they talked freely around Crook. He was always busy so it seemed he didn't notice what they were saying.

Crook was lost in his thoughts when Principal Hadley broke the silence and startled him a bit. "Why do they call you Crook? I checked your records, you do not have a criminal background." she said. Crook laughed, "You made me jump. I thought I was the only one here! But, no ma'am I'm not crooked that way. It's because I had a little stroke about ten years back, so I stay a little bent over and walk sort of crooked. But, that's ok because it matches my crooked smile!" They both laughed. "It's a good thing when the children give you a nickname," Crook added. "That means you're in their trust circle! But, they don't let a whole lot of adults in." Principal Hadley pondered this. She was new to the job. She had been an algebra teacher then assistant principal in another district, so no one in this area really knew her. She often stayed late pouring over information, and during the day tried to connect with as many staff and students as possible. She wanted to really know the people of this school, not just the work they produced.

A tall woman of nearly 6-feet, Ms. Hadley took a seat so as not to tower over Roger. She looked at him and asked, "Who do the people say that the new principal is?" Crook looked at Hadley and noted she was wearing her favorite green suit and matching hat. He replied, "Some say 'the New Principal,' others 'the Jolly Green Teacher,' still others 'the Math Hatter.'" Her eyes got wide as she hadn't heard those last two before! But, Principal Hadley smiled and said to him, "But who do you say that I am?" Roger "Crook" said in reply, "You are the Principal, the courageous, caring, and humble leader of this school." Hadley said to him in reply, "Bless you Roger, for I haven't revealed my goals and plans to you to build a better environment. Both teachers and students appear to be very cliquish here, but we will all be better and happier if we can come together. You are like a father to these students, and so I say you, you are Crook, and in this school we will build a world of kindness. When the children enter the gates of learning, may the outside world not prevail against them. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of Kindness, and you will develop a daily theme to help us thrive as a school family. Whatever is good and hopeful we will bind together; and whatever separates us will be loosed and let go."

Then she strictly ordered him to tell no one of his new assignment.