

MARK'S REMARKS

The past few months I have highlighted the character of cattle in part by contrasting them to swine. While I maintain a greater affection for beef and cattle over hogs and pork, it is time to positively embrace our curly-tailed creature.

My father, alongside a cattle business, managed a farrow-to-finish hog operation. As soon as I was strong enough to hold a pitchfork, carry pails of feed, and bales of straw, and possessed the quickness and agility to grab the back leg of a small lively pig, I found myself in farm-life training and the instruction manual included pigs.

Webster defines the word 'farrow' with these words; *to give birth to a litter of piglets*. I like the word piglet. Along with reminding me of the always caring and somewhat apprehensive Piglet in the Winnie the Pooh and the Hundred Acre Wood stories, the word piglet has a sense of kind innocence. Maybe that is why I enjoyed the first half of dad's operation.

When a person spends a large amount of time in a farrowing house, a large maternity ward for pigs, one realizes piglets, like all newborns, begin rather helpless. While possessing four legs, they begin somewhat wobbly but instinctively they embark on a journey until they find nature's abundant food source, even if this includes being on the receiving end of mother's gentle nose nudges. These soft, clean, and pink newborns are particularly fond of eating and certainly find contentment in curling up and sleeping under the soothing warmth of a heat lamp.

Soon they began to find comfort in their daily routine, of steady eating, sleeping, and instruction. In the life of a piglet, mom is responsible for *all* the nurturing and discipline of her children and a scolding grunt from momma usually sets issues straight.

As piglets grow, so does their curiosity. Innocent curiosity leads to explorations of their small rectangular man-made world and fast growing piglets seem to engage themselves with games of hide-and-seek, tag, and yes wrestling, for even in the animal kingdom it is necessary to find ones place in society.

But for the most part, in the days when pigs were nurtured and tucked in with a fresh layer of straw, they seemed to appreciate their world for what it was. For those who have entered a farrowing house late on a cold wintry night and gazed upon sleeping mothers dreaming of a larger dirt floored world, and brothers and sisters piled in a wide pinkish heap under a heat lamp, you understand the peace and tranquility I associate with the first half of a farrow-to-finish hog operation.

There came a time when it was determined a more cost-effective approach to raising pigs was in raising the floors. Straw was replaced with slotted floors of rubber-coated steel. Times spent cleaning pens with personal care were replaced with electric scrapers running underneath leading to large cement pits outside. While generations of pigs grew up never knowing the smell and comfort of fresh straw, I always thought something was lost in the pursuit of the dollar and the bottom line.

The warmth and the sounds of life associated with a farrowing house are pleasant memories. It was a building offering a reminder that part of our role as God's creation is to care for all his creatures; including the curly-tailed one Adam named a pig. And while the second half of the farrow-to-finish operation holds fewer pleasant memories, today I stand in the first half, along with those engaged in hog operations, thankful for the lessons learned and the opportunity to care for a part of God's good creation.

God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:25)

Under his nurturing care,

Pastor Mark