

"Redemption at John Deere" - Posted July 24, 2008

A couple of summers ago I bought a used lawn tractor from the service manager of an authorized John Deere dealer. It looked great, started and ran once around the yard very nicely, and although it cost \$900, I figured it was worth the investment and that with regular care and maintenance, I'd get years of good service out of it.

Very soon, however, the paint began to fade, so to speak. The problem was that the longer I used it (we're talking minutes here), the less it wanted to move. It acted as though it was low on hydraulic fluid. I talked with the seller who told me the hydraulic unit was sealed and that there was no way to add fluid (not so, I eventually found the level indicator and filler under the seat), but that he'd get me the new drive belt he'd promised when I bought it. Nothing made any difference, however, and after having it entirely serviced at an independent shop, and then in a final act of desperation taking it to the authorized dealer to have the hydraulics serviced and diagnosed, I learned that there was no solution other than to spend another \$1500 or so having the hydraulics rebuilt.

Now, if you've ever been in a similar situation, and most of us have at least one story like this to tell, you feel my pain. My lawn was going unmowed (well, partially mowed, really - I became quite adept at figuring what sequence would get the greatest amount mowed before the tractor stopped moving), my shattered, Walter-Mitty-esque dreams of green-and-yellow tractor ownership and adventure were giving me dyspepsia, I had a \$900 (plus service and repairs) boat anchor that was taking up the bulk of the space in my garden shed, and my wife, loving and gracious woman that she is, could only purse her lips and give me that "You know I love you anyway" look.

Finally I gave up using it entirely after a big metal hanger fell off the mower deck when I got it back from having the hydraulic service and diagnosis, thereby making it impossible to use without gouging up that portion of the lawn that was still getting mowed. Since that time it has sat dejectedly in my shed, looking so good, but being so worthless.

This early spring my thoughts unavoidably turned to it and to how possibly to recoup at least some portion of the loss and once again get my lawn mowed and see my wife smile in the process. I longed to come up with a magical plan that would dazzle her and satisfy me. "I wonder if there is some way to trade it in," I pondered.

One recent Tuesday I was driving through a small town some miles away, when I happened upon a different authorized dealer. Seeing all that gleaming, new, green-and-yellow paint, I was compelled to turn in and make inquiries. I learned two things: a new tractor could be had for less money than I thought, and they did take trade-ins.

"And what would my tractor be worth," I queried, having told them the story of the failed transmission.

"\$900," was the reply.

And so I found redemption at the John Deere dealer. I loaded up the old, ailing tractor, dropped it off, and picked up the new, shiny one. When I got home and regaled my wife with all the details of the saga, I concluded by saying, "Yesterday I had lost \$900; today I found it again."

The news is full of disaster to the point that our eyes glaze over and our brains overload as we try to make sense of it all. These endless tragedies, plagues, famines, and injustices are far more significant than the loss of money on a lawn tractor, but in the end it's redemption that we're seeking - simple, fair, justice - a life where wrongs are righted and problems are resolved in a way that lets us move on in peace.

Funny that we all want it, but that so often we continue to argue and fight and injure those around us anyway.

Imagine if we all offered those who've been wronged even as much redemption as the John Deere dealer did - if we simply gave them enough credit so they could make a new start - if we allowed them to trade in their old, useless things and gave them something shiny and new and useful in exchange.

That's what Christ does for us, isn't it? We trade in our filthy rags for a robe of righteousness, committing our selves to be clothed in the process. We end up with a new suit of clothes, and he ends up with the satisfaction of knowing that he has redeemed another one who was taken advantage of by an unscrupulous shyster who put ashes in our water and left us with a bad taste in our mouths.

Seems to me that would be to the advantage all around.