

A Turkey to Remember

Back when we lived in a warmer climate, our family used to go camping every Thanksgiving. Tent camping was our usual routine—one tent for the kids and one for us. While roughing it, we always tried to have something special for dinner on the big day, but we were resigned to the fact that it wasn't going to be an oven-fresh turkey.

Then an epiphany—our fall feast was forever changed when we were introduced to “trashcan turkey.” Camped in our usual spot, we noticed friends had camped nearby. “Wow, what’s that great smell? Are you guys cooking a turkey?” Stewart smiled at my query and pointed to a metal trashcan turned upside-down and surrounded by glowing charcoal. “Yep, there’s a turkey inside that can and sweet potatoes too!” Later that day, we got a taste of the finished Turkey—awesome.

Stewart showed me how to do it. Start by placing foil on the ground, shiny side up. Use something to hold the turkey off the ground (Stewart used a modified tomato cage). Turn a metal trashcan upside-down over the turkey. Spread a large bag of charcoal on the ground around the perimeter of the can. Light the charcoal and wait. It should take about as long as it would take in the oven at home.

Flash-forward one year and we are preparing our very own trashcan turkey. Everything is in place—now for the charcoal. Hmmm...one bag sure doesn't look like much...maybe it was two. I'll also add this big bag of clump charcoal—it's supposed to burn hotter. Let's see...was there charcoal on top of the can? I'd better add some on top—it can't hurt.

Boy, that turkey started sizzling quickly! In fact, it was crackling so loudly that we could hardly talk over it if we were close to the can. Come to think of it, we couldn't get very close because of the heat. I'm pretty sure that if it had been dark outside, we could have seen that trashcan glowing red. After about an hour, the sizzling was starting to wane (that's about right for a 15-pounder isn't it?). I knew from a previous campout-meal-burning that if it stops sizzling, it's not good....

Donning enough protective gear to fight an oil rig fire, I approached the can. Have you ever thought of how you might pick up a red-hot trashcan when the handles are buried in glowing charcoal? After a few attempts, the bird was free—burned to a crisp, but free. Actually, it was beyond burned. We marveled at how the ends of the drumsticks were gone, apparently vaporized, and turned to ash. Oh well, a dinner of green bean casserole and scalloped potatoes will do just fine....

As we prepared to dig into our slightly smaller than anticipated feast, I thought it would be fun to have a chunk of the blackened carcass on a plate at the table. “I'll carve our bird,” I proclaimed as I launched into an abbreviated thanksgiving prayer/bird-eulogy. To our amazement, inside the crusty charred exterior was the juiciest white meat I have ever had from a turkey! We ended up with a turkey to remember. They say that camping makes everything taste better, and I think it was the best ever.

Now I'm not saying that God was miraculously providing for our dinner, but I'm reminded of verse in Paul's letter to the Romans (8:28) *We know that all things work together for good for those who love God....* All things...even trivial things? I've come to believe that when we make a mess of things, either

by accident, stupidity, or intent, God will work some good. I'm not sure that we always recognize that God-worked good on this side of heaven, but I am confident it is true.

Anticipating Thanksgiving this year, if you want to try cooking a turkey like we did, then just set the oven to "incinerate" and wait till the bird nearly stops sizzling. On the other hand, to do it right I have learned that a single large bag of charcoal is enough. Don't put any charcoal on top of the inverted can. You will know that the turkey is ready when the top of the can finally gets hot to the touch.

Have a great Thanksgiving! --pastor Tony

