

# The Little Church

Listen, this is *Believe It or Not* stuff.

But first an old story you might have heard.

There's a guy, an old soldier maybe, some poor soul left behind on an otherwise deserted Pacific island (swap oceans if you'd like). Poor guy's been on his own for fifty years, sole occupant of this tiny unmapped island.

One day finally, someone drops by, first visitor in way too many years. The visitor is astounded at the place the old guy has built. He had nothing else to do for fifty years, I suppose, so he built himself an entire town.

"There's my post office," the old guy says, "and right there's my town hall. And right up the block here--see the steeple? --that's my church." Broad smile. Proud.

Mr. First Visitor looks down the other direction, where he'd spotted yet another steeple. He points, draws his eyebrows, shrugs his shoulders, as if confounded.

"Oh yeah," the old man says, "that's the church where I used to go."

It's a rule of thumb: where two or three or gathered, someone's likely to leave.

If you think I'm talking about your church, lighten up. When first I heard that story, I heard it from Jewish folks talking "temple." I'm not kidding.

You're not likely to believe Keystone's Little Church (that's upper case). It's in a town so small the only gas station is Standard Oil, and that's gone too.

Keystone, Nebraska, is barely a village--but then it wasn't much more in 1908, when its newly settled citizens, blessed with an almost divine civil spirit, built The Little Church. Not mega-church, believe me, a church so small you can almost throw it in the back of the van. Put a choir inside and there'd be no room for a congregation; you'd have to pipe in a preacher if you wanted a sermon. Some people, I'm sure, have bigger sheds. Five miles away beside Lake McConaughy, hundreds of travel trailers make the place look like a Port-A-Potty.

Seriously, The Little Church is nowhere near fifty feet, stem to stern, front to back--no, front to front. Yeah--"front to front." Here's the thing: this little church has done something for the ages by sweetly combining whole congregations--whole denominations--for the very first time since Luther's Reformation. Seriously. On one end there's an altar for the Catholics, who need to hold mass come the First Day of the week. Turn around, and on the other end of the sanctuary stands a pulpit for the Protestants, who need sermons more than wine and wafers.

The Little Church is a spiritual switch-hitter. Okay, both sides meeting together could create a problem, but that won't likely occur 'till Kingdom Come. For this time being at least, The Little Church belongs to everyone

Kevin Costner became Iowa's favorite adopted son, when, in *Field of Dreams*, he said, "Is this heaven, no it's Iowa."

Now Keystone, Nebraska, is close enough to Nebraska's Lake Mac to pick up more vacationers these days than it has since The Little Church was built, but only the truly devoted townies would make a claim for Keystone as heaven.

But The Little Church testifies to something beautiful anyway. It stands in a broad field of cleanly cut green grass. No gravel; there's no parking lot. No

need--just a darling little church, a block up from the blacktop that zooms in and out of town, a tiny little place you can't miss.

And you shouldn't. It's a shelter in the time of storm, a little palace of peace, a taste of heaven.

I'll confess my sin. I was skeptical. I figured this little church was too good to be true, so I left town in a scramble rather than tour Keystone. I didn't want to know if there was yet another church someplace around town, the church people used to attend.

I'm not saying there isn't, only that if there are two churches in Keystone, Nebraska, I don't want to know.

Visit Keystone sometime if you're anywhere near Lake Mac. Just to know it's there will do your heart a blessing, just plain-old good for the soul.