

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

On this Boy Scout Sunday,

[since we won't have Scouts in uniform in the church,]

I thought I would bring you along
to my favorite campground in the whole world,
so far.



It is morning...almost.

The sky is light,
a pale peach color with tendrils of brilliant orange cloud,
but the sun is not yet up.

I turn the knob on the camp stove off
and the growling hiss of white gas combustion abruptly stops.

I lift the pot and pour boiling water into my mug
and the aroma of Russian Tea

is added to the mix of cedar and pine that envelops me.

I take my steaming mug and walk past the group of silent tents
and step down to the banks of Washington Creek.

Sometime before my arrival,
a tree has fallen at just the right angle along the bank
so that I will have a perfect spot to sit and watch the water swirl by.

Quiet. Beauty. And time.

All the ingredients are there
for me to spend some quality time with God.



Last week Jesus called his first assistants,
as he walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

When the Sabbath came

Jesus brought his little band to the synagogue
where he taught and cast out an unclean spirit.

In our Gospel story this morning

we hear a little more of the beginnings of Jesus' ministry.

The section picks up right after the casting out of the spirit.

Simon and Andrew have brought Jesus home

where they discover that Simon's mother in law is down sick with a fever.

Two lines later she is up serving them.

No fanfare.

No dramatic interruptions,

just "He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up.

Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them."

If you are not careful

you might even miss the healing

and attribute the miracle

to the second most powerful force in the universe;

motherhood.

For me though,

it is clear that this is in truth a miracle, and no small one at that,

for a fever that can lay a mother low

is truly a fever of epic,

one might even say, biblical proportions.

That Jesus banishes this fever by merely taking her hand

speaks to me of his majesty

more eloquently than any embellishments could.

✠

Gazing into the water, the painted sky is reflected on its surface.

The air is still and the water is barely moving.

The reflection is almost perfect,
the beauty breathtaking.

A slight mist floats above the creek
and clings to the hollows of the ridges rising around me;
not enough to obscure,
the mist softens the edges of this hard land.

I notice that the current in the creek appears to be picking up
as streamers of algae gracefully wave in the current.

The subdued chattering of birds in the wood around me,
and the babbling of the water
as it swirls around the stray branches hanging from my pew,
combine to remind me of church on Sunday morning
before the service starts.

✠

The good people of Capernaum wait until sundown,
the official end of the Sabbath,
before they begin to bring the sick and possessed
to receive the healing of Jesus.

It is not long before the whole town is gathered before the door.
What a night it must have been.

Who could blame him if Jesus had decided to sleep in the next morning.
After all, he'd probably been up most of the night.

✠

While I sit on my log perch quietly sipping my tea,
a Great Blue Heron joins me in my chapel,
processing down the center aisle of the creek
praying, I suppose, for his daily fish.

His prayers are answered
as with a dart of his head he spears breakfast.

Lifting his head in thanksgiving, the fish slides down his throat.

With a hop and a whoosh the heron takes to the air,

off to do whatever it is herons do when they're not fishing.



“In the morning while it was still very dark,

he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.”

You may have thought,

while you were listening to the Gospel this morning,

that the important part was about healing people,

or casting out demons,

or even proclaiming the message.

As usually happens with scripture it is about all of these things,

but what stood out to me this morning

was how important it is to pray.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus prays?

Isn't he God? Does he really need to pray?

Jesus prays because it is important.

He is teaching us an important truth.

Prayer is the life blood that energizes all of ministry.

It keeps our ministry honest and true.

It fills up our hearts when they are empty,

and lifts them when they are low.



The light is getting stronger.

When I look down at the creek again

the current seems to have slowed again.

As I watch amazed,

the current slowly stops,

and then begins to flow backward.

Gazing at the water,

I am wondering how it is that a stream can reverse its flow
when suddenly I hear a strange sound behind me.

“UMPH”

I know that sound.

As the sun peeks over the horizon,

a puff of breeze carries the musky smell of moose to my nose.

That something weighing close to a thousand pounds
could get this close before I take notice
is a further cause for wonder.

A mere 20 yards away,

the female moose clambers down the bank and into the creek bed.

Turning to walk downstream
she becomes aware of my presence
and both of us take a moment to stare at one another.

To gaze on the face of a moose

is to know that God has a sense of humor.

I wonder if she is thinking the same thing about me.

After a moments contemplation

she decides that I am no threat
and ambles past me on her way to Windigo Harbor
for her own breakfast.

The sun is now full up,

beginning the work of burning off the morning mists.

The sounds of human activity from the campground behind me
invade my chapel of repose.

With one more swallow my mug is empty.

It's time to go.

My spirit fed, it is now time to feed my own rumbling stomach.



We don't know what Jesus said or heard in his prayers,
but we do know that they helped.

When Simon Peter finally finds Jesus
he knows what he is to do
and that now is the time to do it.

Through prayer he has come to a decision.

In this story

we are given a glimpse of the power and mystery of prayer
and it's importance.

Even God prays.

When I can, I go to my own wilderness to pray.

I take spiritual comfort and renewal,
as I experience the clear thumbprint of God's hand
at work in the wonder of creation.

When I cannot get away, I pray wherever I am.

I don't pray enough,
but nobody does
until they can truly make their whole life a prayer.

That is the goal I seek.

That is the goal we all seek as Christians;
that prayer would so infuse our lives
as to be indistinguishable from life itself.

Like all activities in life, to improve one must practice.

As Episcopalians we have a wonderful book full of prayers
and it is handy to have around.

But you really only need two things to pray
and you have them with you wherever you go.

Yourself and God.

A wilderness is handy to take away the distractions of our busy lives,
but it too is unnecessary.

With practice one can pray through the distractions,
offering them up as well.

I invite you in the weeks ahead,
as we begin to enter again the metaphorical wilderness of Lent,
to make a special effort to pray.

Try different kinds of prayer.

Root around the prayer book.

Invent your own prayers.

Pray at different, “unusual” times.

Pray in different “unusual” ways

and in different “unusual” places.

Expand your personal experience with prayer.

Get to know God better.

Prayer is the most important tool we have

to help us live the life God intended for us.

It connects us to God and to each other.

It makes us better people.

Let us pray...

Always.

Amen.