

Let us pray...

Back when I was going through university, one of the ways I put myself through was working during the summers for the Canada Wildlife Service. I lived and worked in the bird sanctuary of Vaseau Lake in the south Okanagan. I think I've told you how my soul is most connected to that place, that land. It was an idyllic job: gorgeous environment, outside all the time, canoeing, hiking. And I got to indulge what became one of my hobbies: bird watching, counting identifying. I learned a lot about birds and about life in those summers.

I also got to see biology in its raw form. Like, for example, the behavior of mallard ducks in spring. I know the hormonal reason for it but to watch a drake literally prancing around trying to out-strut the other drakes so that his genetic material would get passed on to the next generation... got a little much.

But it seems male ducks are required by the laws of nature to make absolute fools of themselves every spring. It also seems that we humans don't restrict our foolishness to spring.

That's why when Dodge needed a name for a truck lo those many years ago, they went with Ram. All the better for men to strut in. This is one big tough truck. Ford responded with the notion that perhaps numbers will appeal to their largely male market- F150, or better yet, F250, or even better, F250 king cab. Not queen cab. Nope. Gotta be king cab.

So what do ducks and trucks have to do with God and faith? Well, whether you are a duck, a truck driver or, it would seem, a disciple of Jesus, the question of who is greatest among us is powerful.

"When they came to Capernaum, and when he was in the house, Jesus asked them, 'what were you arguing about on the way?' But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest." I wonder if that argument was all that different than the ducks on Vaseau Lake.

You know, when I read that, I could just imagine the sinking in Jesus' heart. More than any of the other gospel accounts, Mark lays out for us in event after event how utterly at odds was Jesus with the dynamics of power in his day. He was offered power and prestige but he turned it down because it was power-over and that was not his way. He taught of a kingdom of power-with in which the poor and the weak had a place. He showed people, in teaching and healing, that the power of real life and real love was in their hands no matter who they were and where they stood in the pecking order of the world. Their faith could make them well. But many preferred to believe that real life and real love was scarce and you had to compete for it, vie for it, win it, prove you are the greatest and then get it.

They didn't understand that Jesus was not building a kingdom of kings, but a kingdom, a commonwealth of peasants, of everyone, including the poor and vulnerable. They wanted to be generals and important minister in his future kingdom, when there are no generals and everyone is an important minister. You can imagine what it must have been like for Jesus orienting his way around the poor and vulnerable, all the while being accompanied by disciples who are so caught up in competing with each other that they don't see.

“Look. You don't need to do that power dance. That kind of power doesn't last and ultimately doesn't matter in the kingdom of God- the kingdom where love is the real power. Take a look at this child who has not yet learned how the world works and has not yet forgotten how to simply be- who is able to laugh and dance and love and give freely. Learn to live like that. You don't need to compete. There is enough of what really matters to go around.”

*Sing: Come as a little child. Come with a smile of eagerness. Greet each new day as a special gift of love. Even if you're old and grey, though you've come a long hard way, come ready to sing and play and dance, ready to risk and take a chance, for of such is the kingdom. For of such is the kingdom. Come as a child.*

Popular psychology has tried to say a similar thing with therapies that try to help us “get in touch with our inner child.” Although popular psychology is often more about popularity than psychology, there is often amid all the fanfare, a grain of pure gold- a tiny piece of wisdom. In this case, the grain of pure gold is the conviction that there exists within each of us, and indeed inside any community of people, a vulnerable, weak, open and real person. Even if most of the time we put on a good show, there is a genuine, vulnerable soul in us, even when we are completely in the grip of other forces.

Jesus saw his disciples competing for centre stage and he sat them down together and said, competing like that, your reflexive quest for power over each other- it has no place in my way. Rather, let the child reign within you. Anyone who can welcome the child, the vulnerable one, the weak one, welcomes me. As we are able to welcome our weakness, vulnerability, playfulness, wisdom that childlike self that lives in us, we welcome divinity.

Now, I know it is not easy to live like that all the time. You’d never get the dishes done. However, there are moments when we don’t seem to have much choice- when events conspire to make it more likely for us to welcome the child, to enter into that vulnerable place. We may lose a job and realize we are not the bread-winner we prided ourselves in. We may become ill and realize we are not immortal. A love may fail, and we come face to face with our own part in the failure of love. It is remarkable the number of times people talk about meeting God in those times of real loss and weakness.

The treasure of Jesus’ way, the power of which I believe every one of us will one day realize, that treasure seems to be contained more often than not in those weak and helpless places in our lives and in the world, those places that yearn for it the most, that hunger for it most deeply. When God meets us in our weakness, that ego, that competitive small self, kind of falls away and we start to view the world,

our priorities, what matters through the eyes of our heart. As hard as that can be sometimes, it is also beautiful and true.

For many years in other places, I used to do services in care homes, sometimes even weekly or monthly. So I regularly would gather, often during the week, with seniors and we would sing favorite hymns, and hear scripture and pray. It was kind of informal but lovely. When my son Aidan was really little, I would bring him. So the seniors were used to him lying under the communion table or crawling between wheelchairs. In fact I think his ministry there was probably more significant than mine.

And I will always cherish the memory of one time when we were praying, and it was quiet and reverent, and Aidan began to go like this. “Click” He did it all through the prayer. It wasn’t really disruptive, just kind of there. After the prayer ended I asked the gathered dozen or so 80 to 90 year olds, “how many of you can do this?” Click. And in joyful, frivolous, silly chorus, they all responded... “Click, click, click...” And I thought, “there it is. The eyes of the heart are open. Heart to heart communication. The child among the children. The wise ones and the wise one. The kingdom of God. Come as a child.”

Amen.