

Pulpit Exchange – January 29, 2012

Dear colleagues,

Many of you preach excellent sermons on a weekly basis, sharing the Good News in your parish pulpit to familiar faces. On January 29, many of us will exchange our home pulpit and go on the road to another parish or mission community. We have been invited to do this exchange out of a spirit of shared diocesan mission, lately expressed through a shared desire to increase the vital ministries of the Bishop Claggett Camp & Conference Center through the campaign to add improved and fully accessible adult lodging.

I have gathered a few Claggett related themes and a story that may be useful in your sermon preparation for January 29th. It is likely that you have your own story of a transformative moment from an experience at Claggett or another similar retreat location that works well with the readings and the message that the Spirit calls you to offer.

Enjoy the pulpit exchange and the opportunity to preach the Good News to new friends in Christ.

In peace,

Dina van Klaveren

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany / Year B, RCL

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Moses said, The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. This is what you requested of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: "If I hear the voice of the LORD my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die." Then the LORD replied to me: "They are right in what they have said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak-- that prophet shall die."

One might consider how God's people have worked to create a legacy by passing on the tradition and teachings to upcoming generations. Or, perhaps the idea of "raising up prophets" ties in to your experience of Claggett or another similar place. Claggett currently is used for numerous educational and discernment purposes: diaconal formation, vocational retreats, clergy conference, vestry retreats, Cursillo and Happening events, camps, youth events, Quiet Days and more. With the construction of the Inn at Claggett, there is an increased potential to host more retreats and conferences, such as CREDO. And, there will be accessible lodging for calling up prophets who may have mobility issues.

A holy place, like Mount Horeb, the "mountain of God," might yield a good image for a sermon that focuses on the holy ground of our diocese, whether the Cathedral of the Incarnation or Claggett or another location. Horeb is first named in Genesis 3:1 when Moses meets the burning

bush, and comes up again later in Exodus 17:6 as Moses strikes to rock to obtain water. It is also the location for the moment when the Israelites strip off their ornaments in Exodus 33:6 after the golden calf incident. Perhaps for some of us, Claggett is a modern day Horeb, where we can meet God, be refreshed in miraculous ways, and be stripped of those things that weigh us down as we wander toward the Promised Land.

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; but anyone who loves God is known by him.

Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "no idol in the world really exists," and that "there is no God but one." Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth-- as in fact there are many gods and many lords-- yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. "Food will not bring us close to God." We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

Claggett is a great place to bring a divided people together. There is enough room to ramble and seek some quiet, great space for conferences and prayer, and well-designed space for continuing conversation around a fireplace, garden, or a meal. "All of us possess knowledge," and by gathering together we can participate in the type of loving community that "builds up." Whether discussing confirmation or the Anglican Covenant, the clergy of our diocese have been brought together time and time again at Claggett to be built up together.

Mark 1:21-28

Jesus and his disciples went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching-- with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

While this text relates well to the ministries of teaching and healing that take place throughout our diocese, and especially at Claggett, it also brings up a desire to know more about what Jesus was teaching that people found so astounding. We are told repeatedly that Jesus teaches in the synagogue, yet we have little to understand what he may have said. The key point seems to be that he taught with authority, and that it resulted in healing.

Last summer, on the last afternoon of middle school camp, parents start streaming into the chapel at Claggett to see their children after a week apart. The parents had excited, eager looks on their faces as they asked their sons and daughters, “Well, how was it? What did you do all week?” And often, in return, they had a reply of “Fine,” or “We did some stuff.” Poor parents! They were so curious, and these middle school campers were so distracted by new friends as they bid their good-bye’s.

As the chaplain that week, I witnessed the senior and junior counselors daily instructing their small groups about what it means to serve God. I witnessed as the campers took risks, tried new things, laughed, did a service project, ate together, connected, made strong friendships, prayed, sang, and had a good time. I witnessed their radiant faces, their eagerness to grow in faith. And then, as their parents arrive, their only description is “Fine,” or “We did some stuff.”

I know that the authority of the Gospel, the authority that changes lives, was felt by these young people that week. Some of them (I hope!) shared their experiences with their parents, just as they had with the counselors and with me. I was delighted to be present as they paid attention to that authority of Christ in their lives. And yet, they had trouble expressing this to their parents, who appeared so eager to know about their camp experience.

During the fall semester, a mother of a middle school camper came rushing into her rector’s office one morning. She had just received an email from a teacher at her son’s middle school. She thrust her Blackberry under her rector’s nose and said, “Read this!”

The email from the teacher went like this: “Dear Mr. and Ms. Jones, I am delighted to have your son Matthew in my class. He is a good student, and I am enjoying him very much. But this morning I write to let you know that Matthew has been sticking up for another student in the class when other kids pick on the student. You should be very proud of Matthew – you are raising a fine young man.”

Ms. Jones asked her son what was happening in the class and shared the email with Matthew. Matthew, in typical middle-school style, only said, “I have to stick up for him. We went to camp together.”

As Matthew grows to understand that authority of the Gospel in his life, I pray that he, and all other children and youth who come to summer camp at Claggett, will expand their advocacy alongside not only those who they know from a week at camp, but for all of God’s people. Whatever God is doing in Matthew’s life, we adults do not always get to hear a whole lot of description about it. Yet, like those witnessing Jesus teaching in the synagogue, we can be astounded by the results.