

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Rev Nancy Wakely - May 10th, 2015

When our daughter Caity was around 5 years old, she pulled one of those 5 year old tricks. Ask Mom a hard question when she is driving the car, in a hurry, and running late for court. She said, “Mom, how can God love other families as much as he loves our family?”

Look, she was a cute kid and not nearly as annoying as I was at the same age. I was busy at that age trying to figure out simple things like why my mother gave birth to my irritating little brother and whether or not some nice family would take him off my hands so I could be the center of the universe again. Actually, they didn't need to even be a nice family as long as they would just make him go away.

But Caity was never a child who would put up with a simple, “I don't know” or “can we talk about this later”. She would say, “I need to know now! I know that you know the answer! Just tell me!” Needing to be thinking about the hearings scheduled for that morning where people were fighting over who got the toaster or who got custody of the kids I decided to kick my brain into closing argument mode and come up with something that would work for her.

Wish I could remember my exact response but it went something like this. “God is like the river by our house. The river runs quiet and deep sometimes and gives everyone a safe place to wade in the water. Sometimes the river runs fast and we can hear it roar and carry everything along with it. God's love is like the river. It whispers and it roars but it is always there and it so deep and so wide that it can touch everyone and still make each one of us seem special to Him.”

We had the opportunity this past week to see the river...in our yard and in the woods that run along it's sides. It was so big but it brought with it some benefits after several years of drought. No doubt the vernal pond in the woods will be filled and will be home and hatching grounds once again to the anole lizard population and a place for tadpoles waiting to become toads. It will provide much needed water to the sand plums in the woods that are the base for the best jelly ever. There will be fresh greenery and pools of water for the deer that slip quietly through the woods late in the day. Each and every place and creature are special beneficiaries of the waters of life.

A few years ago, our daughter Caity came back home for awhile when she was recovering from a serious blow in her life. We walked the woods by the river for hours on end. We talked about love, eternal life, exclaimed over the stands of sand plums, and shrieked with laughter when I stepped on a snake. It also became a place for her to heal and then go back out into the world.

When I think about God, rather than my childhood vision of a guy who looks like Santa Claus, I think of the my beloved river. And in the heat of August when the dry heat is bearing down all I have to do is walk through the woods and dip my feet in the cool water.

And some day, my daughters know to scatter my ashes there so they can slip lazily through the boondocks of southern Cleveland County. Perhaps the scent of the oranges that my great-grandmother peeled for me will still be in the air. Maybe the smell of my grampaw's pipe and his cherry blend tobacco or my grammaw's fried chicken will still be lingering along the river in my childhood haunts. The laughter of my parents, aunts and uncles, and cousins will not have died out and the acapella voices in our little congregation singing "Tell me the story of Jesus, write on my heart every word" will still echo along the banks.

That is where I learned about God and Jesus and love. It's where I learned that no matter how many of us sat down at the table, God loved us all, there was plenty to go around, and we were each special to Him.

That is what I felt the first time I walked through the doors of St. Michael's. It doesn't matter here that this parish is not a hundred years old. The river runs through this place and the people here know that each and every one of us is special...that there is always room at the table and in the pews, and that God's love is deep and wide. There are memories here that will carry us and sustain us for generations to come. Through good times that bless and times that burn like the sun in August there is this place to find cool and refreshing solace...a place to feel the healing powers of loving community. This is where we learn about God and Jesus and love and what it means to share that love.

We don't have to wait until the end of our lives to "gather at the beautiful river that flows from the throne of God". The river is flowing right through here...through us and through our hearts and out these doors. In big ways and small ways, in roars and in whispers, we know that God's love is big enough for the whole world. His love was here before us and it will be here after we're gone but it is right here, right now, and in this place. Rejoice and be glad in it...and go with the flow.