

To Shell and Back

Pastor John Klawiter

July 24, 2022

Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

Grace and peace to you my siblings in Christ,

On Monday, **a group of 30 of us from Faith** (group picture) embarked on a journey up north to the Boundary Waters of Minnesota.

This meant we had four separate groups that each entered different entry points into the wilderness.

My group included me and my son, Phin, who is 10 and all he wanted to do was fish. We had a guide from Camp Vermilion. **And six 9th grade boys who are friends from confirmation and school.**

The boys were very... confident (**slide of them with canoe**).

They had a lot of faith in their own abilities and were very competitive with each other. I could tell right away that this overconfidence might get them in trouble.

I didn't have to wait long.

We had a big route planned (map) to go from Little Indian Sioux to **Nina Moose** (click again for route). It's an impressive, but doable trip. There's a lot of paddling and some long portages, but one of our other groups was also doing that route.

I planned on the other group going first, then we would get on trail 15 minutes later.

But, as we waited at the entry point, our boys were raring to go. They took off down the path and we loaded up the canoes. They wanted to get way ahead of the other group.

So we did. About 15 minutes into the first paddle, the canoe with three boys let out a wail. The other two canoes turned around to see what was happening.

A look of sheer dread was on their faces. They'd all tried adjusting their weight at the same time and water was pouring into their canoe.

They were sinking. Like the Titanic.

We were on calm water. No waves. Yet, they'd managed to swamp a canoe that contained our equipment pack containing both tents.

They gathered everything up and swam towards a beaver dam where they could stand and drain the water from the canoe. The packs were returned to the canoe.

The other group from Faith casually paddled past our group and waved.

Finally, all settled in again, we re-embarked on our journey. The boys were definitely humbled by this experience.

They seemed much more willing to listen.

We made camp that night on Shell Lake... the other group made it to a **beautiful camp site** on a point with a beautiful sunset, a nice breeze to keep the bugs away and great fishing.

We got the site next to them. In the woods. Facing east.

When we unpacked the tents, they were drenched. We set up camp hoping they'd dry out enough before bed.

They weren't. And then, we had a steady rain all night.

My feet were in a puddle at the end of the tent. My sleeping bag continued to absorb the water like a celery stalk... until I was drenched up to my waist.

I woke up assuming we weren't going to be able to continue. There was no way. All of our stuff was soaked; it would be even heavier to carry than the day before.

We used the satellite phone to call the camp. They assured us the weather would be warmer that afternoon, so when the other group from Faith left their campsite, we hiked all of our stuff over and hung it out to dry. All day.

Finally, by the afternoon, we could set up our mostly dry tents and sleeping bags.

Of course, this meant we would need to re-route our plans. We couldn't realistically make it all the way to our preferred exit point. We'd have to turn around the next day. **(click on red line)**

It wasn't the plan, but we would have to go out where we came in.

However, this did give us a chance to enjoy the scenic view atop a large gorge called **Devils Cascade along the way.**

After this, it was official. If our trip had a "title", it was obviously that we went to **"Shell and back."**

But, it wasn't a failure.

(slide of boys on rock)

The camp had a theme for the week they introduced at the opening campfire called Radical God. Each day had a different focus, like Radical Love or Radical Grace.

Suddenly, grace became something more than just a churchy concept that they heard about in confirmation.

Radical grace was seeing that the swamped canoe changed our plans, but they would argue for the better—they loved that the pace wasn't as intense.

In fact, if you ask the kids what their favorite day of the trip was, they'd all say it was the day we walked down the island to the new campsite. They fished and swam all day. They played pinecone home run derby (yes, it was very competitive).

At the sunset devotional time, they were able to say that.

I've been going to the BWCA since I was their age. At least 20 trips.

I know how important this was to my development—not just to become a pastor, but to become a better human.

I can relate to the disciples who gather around Jesus and ask him to teach them to pray.

Sounds so simple, doesn't it? Yet Jesus understands. He knows that it's a genuine request on how to talk to God.

The disciples are learning about God and Jesus provides them a few petitions familiar to us in the Lord's Prayer.

This version is shorter than what we pray. It's shorter than the version found in Matthew's gospel. It also has a few other threads connected—like the friend who has house guests at midnight.

He goes to a neighbor to ask for bread.

Jesus appears to tell his audience that "because of his persistence, he will get up and give him whatever he needs."

What does that mean? Jesus is telling us that through prayer, we can be willing to ask for help. We can trust our petitions with God. We might not always get bread in return, but the line between us and God, it's always open.

After our long day of drying out, we heard some rumbles in the sky again.

One of the boys prayed out loud in their tent. He asked for shelter from the storms and thanked God for a great day.

It was a cool moment. It was a God moment.

It was radical grace.

Why does Faith continue to send groups to camp each year?

Just like disciples asking Jesus for help to build a strong relationship with God, being at camp is a powerful way to build a relationship for our youngest disciples at church.

When I got off trail on Friday, I was able to see and hear the stories from the other 3 groups. There was a buzz. An energy. Everyone wanted to share.

What did I see as the best outcomes of the week?

Friendship (slide). Fishing (slide). Family (slide). Food. (slide). Fun (slide).

And of course, **Faith (slide).**

As we left Camp Vermilion, visitors are left with final words of wisdom for whatever journey is next. A sign above the road says **“Remember your Creator in the day of your youth.”**

The kids were taught a prayer at the beginning of the week.

It’s a simple reminder of what lies ahead and whatever you face on your journey, God goes with you.

It’s called the Prayer of the Voyageur. I invite you to pray it with me:

“Help me LORD, to leave my hurried life behind. Help me know the quiet life within thy templed trees and lakes to fine. Give me eyes to see each task upon the trail. Give me faith to know thy eyes will never fail. Grant me patience when paths seem long. Grant me grace to share with friends in word and song. Plant clean wings upon my feet which now with laden shoes are shod. Silence me, o Christ, I would be still and know that thou art God. Amen”

This week, may God give you faith like a child. May you have the humility of a servant. And may you experience the radical grace of our God... and the ability to put that grace into words to share with others. Amen.