

Letters from Camp

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church, Rev. Dr. Anne Fisher
July 5, 2020, Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Our own member Don Alman will be riding his bike 50 miles next week in order to raise money for scholarships to go to our church camp, Clearwater Forest. In the past 16 years, Don has raised nearly \$38,000. Why does he brave the July heat to travel around two lakes in the name of Clearwater Forest? Why has he in past years sat the vestibule to catch people coming out of church in order to ask people to sponsor him any way that they can? What makes church camp so important that he does this and so many others give to this cause? Many of you out there have very fond memories of camp. For me, it was the first time away without family. It is very sad that our children and youth cannot experience church camp this year. I am confident that as long as there are campfires and s'mores, and arts and crafts, camps will continue to have a place even if it is only in our hearts for now.

In our Scripture lesson today, Jesus is stretching his listeners with new ideas. He is helping them to grow spiritually that moves them beyond the parental safety net of the law. He challenges the ones who should know better but, in fact, remain clueless. Jesus then turns to the ones in the margins -- the "infants," the ones who don't know much -- and says listen to them, they understand about God more than you with all the knowledge and influence. Author and Franciscan Brother, Richard Rohr writes, "There are some things that can only be known experientially, and each generation must learn it for themselves. Let us listen to God's Word as written in **Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

¹⁶"But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, ¹⁷"We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.' ¹⁸For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; ¹⁹the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

²⁵At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed

them to infants; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

For me, church camp was a week filled with ups and downs. By the end, I did not want to leave. Back in my day, one of the best times at camp was the mail call. We also had time in the day to write letters during FOB (Flat on Bunk) time. A time when the counselors got a break! (When our daughters went to camp, they encouraged us to send emails.) So, in honor of all our campers who did not get to go to camp this year and for our long-ago church camp memories, this morning I ask you to take flight with your imagination and listen to some contrived letters of a young girl at a church camp. Although these letters are composed in the comfort of air conditioning with many years removed from camping, I don't doubt that the camp experience has left lasting impressions on many a camper on the brink of maturation. So, sit back imagine the hot sticky cabins, the tepid Kool-Aid, and the unbounded enthusiasm of some pre-adolescent veteran campers at a church camp somewhere in the sultry Midwest!

Monday morning

Dear Mom and Dad,

Things are awful! This is my fourth year at camp so you would think that I would know what to expect but nothing is the same! First off, Pastor Rick, our fearless camp director, is not here. He has always been with us, now there is a new director, I can't even remember her name! She is changing everything! Our morning opening, the schedule, everything! Most of the same girls are in my cabin, but we have two new ones and they are kind of quiet. It just isn't the same without Pastor Rick here. I want to go home!!

Let me tell you what happened. After our cabin got reunited, it was time for the traditional scavenger hunt. Last year the hunt was so hard only the oldest campers got the clues and they won while the rest of us were left still trying to figure out what it meant, so we were ready for it this year! Our cabin was ready

to win!! We got the list of clues and headed deep into the woods. The clues this year seemed rather easy but we knew there was a hidden trick and message to them so we worked real hard trying to figure out what they really meant. When the time was up, we had only gotten the first couple of clues figured out. We went back to the rest of the campers, confident that if we could not get them, no one would. We found out that the first-time campers had completed the list and had won! Imagine that! There were no tricks to it, the clues were as easy as they appeared and the younger campers beat us!

“No fair!” We cried, “You made it so easy that these first-time campers got it right away” Were we mad! We have worked for years to gain the right to win the scavenger hunt and were beaten out by these new campers.

If that wasn't bad enough that new director, old what's-her-name, used the scavenger hunt as an illustration at vespers Sunday night. She said that people put unrealistic expectations on their faith. They say, “I need to know this.” “I need proof for that and then I will believe.” They make believing and being faithful hard work. Jesus tells us to move forward in faith not with all the answers but by trusting God's hand to guide us in life. She says we carry too much baggage with us and this baggage is filled with expectations and wanting everything to fit into a nice neat package of predictability. Life doesn't go that way so sometimes all that baggage weighs us down. She had the nerve to use our complaining about the traditional scavenger hunt as an example. She said last year we said it was too hard and now this year the senior campers say it is too easy. Maybe we were working too hard in trying to beat everyone that we missed the point altogether. She challenged us to look at what baggage we carry that gets in the way of our relationship with each other and with God. HAH!

I'll tell you right now the biggest baggage I have is this new director. If she weren't here, things would be a lot better! Well it's time for swimming. I better end. I am going to take the deep-water swimming test today I figure I can pass it without any problem. After all, I'm from a family of such good swimmers.

Love, Margo

PS One thing hasn't changed; the food is still terrible!

Wednesday morning

Dear Mom and Dad,

If I weren't 100 miles away, I would come home right now! Things are simply going from bad to worse. I didn't write yesterday because I did not know how to tell you this, but here goes... I failed my swimming test. That's right the only one in our family who isn't a natural born swimmer. I am sorry I let you down. The instructor told me it looked like I was too tense in the water and that I needed to relax more. I was really upset, I kept thinking about how disappointed you would be and how much my sisters and brother would tease me for not being able to swim. "Oh Margo", they would say, "How could you not pass a simple water test. It's so easy." The instructor took me aside and talked about maybe having all these good swimmers in the family adds an extra burden on me. She told me that when I try the test again to think of myself not about you or about the rest of my family. When I was ready to pass the test for me alone then she was sure I could do it. Well I started thinking about it and I realized that I did not like swimming as much as the rest of you. That if it were just up to me, I would be happy spending the entire time in the shallow end. Then I realized it would not be the end of the world if I were not a great swimmer and I was not my sisters or brother. You would still have me as a daughter, wouldn't you? To tell you the truth, it was a tremendous relief to let go of all of that. You know what? This morning I went to the instructor and told her I would like to try again this time for me and guess what! I passed!!! But you know what else? Even though I can go in the deep end now, I still prefer being in the shallow end and that is where I spend most of my time. So, I guess things aren't so bad.

Speaking of not being so awful, Pastor Joy, our director, is really not that bad either. In fact, last night she talked about how we carry such unnecessary burdens. How expectations of others weigh us down and how our own expectations often get in our way. We wrote some of the things that get in our way. Our own burdens and she told us to ask Jesus to share the weight of them. I put down trying to be a good swimmer was a burden. At first I felt a little funny. It's such of silly thing, certainly not worth Jesus' time and energy. But Pastor Joy went on to say anything that causes us to be burdened is worth inviting us to

hand that over to Jesus, no matter how silly or mundane it might be. Then we threw the papers in the fire to get rid of those things that weigh us down.

Back in our cabin, one of the new girls spoke up and told about the anger she had towards her father for leaving her family. That is a burden that she has carried alone for a long time. Writing down our burdens made her realize that God knows the injustice and mistakes of each of us and continues to love us. If God can get past what her father did, then maybe she can too. She is beginning to realize how that anger is hurting her life as well as those she loves.

This morning we all felt better -- I guess you could say "lighter." HaHa! We are ready to try new things, to take chances and not be caught up with whether we succeed or fail. It's time to go. Life here is not so bad, even Pastor Joy is starting to grow on me. The food still is terrible!

Love, Margo

Friday morning,

Dear Mom and Dad,

I can't believe that camp is almost over. We had our candlelight vespers service last night. It was different than it had been in the past with our old director, Pastor Rick. I still miss him. And that's ok! Pastor Joy talked again about the tremendous gift that Jesus gives us through his promise to be with us. And how Jesus wants us to take up his yoke (that's something oxen put around their neck) and walk with him. It is up to us to allow Jesus to share our burdens. We sat in the outdoor chapel singing songs and being together. Sometimes I get scared about the future. If I can remember to share the responsibilities, the burdens placed upon me with my God, then I do not feel as frightened. It seems even in this short period of time I am more at peace with the things that I can and cannot do and that I do not have to be what someone else wants me to be. But I also know I cannot do this alone, only with God's help.

Later, we stood in a circle and had Communion. The sun was setting at the time and it was beautiful. I know I have had Communion at church, but this time I listened to the words, "Come to me, all those who labor and are heavy laden and

I will give you rest.” I felt that Jesus was talking directly to me. And then when it got dark, we each had a candle and stood in a big circle we passed the flame to each candle and in silence walked in single file over the hill and back to our cabins all you could see is the line of light walking slowly ahead. It is a moment that I will always remember. I felt that Jesus was walking with me sharing my fears and concerns as well as the beauty of the moment. Seeing all those candles lit up I felt that when we all pull together; we can light up a dark world.

I thought how often we have Communion at church and most of the time. I want church to end so I can get on with the next thing. Somehow, if we allow Jesus to walk with us, it’s as if the next thing doesn’t really matter.

I can’t wait to see you and don’t forget to sign me up for next year!

Love your camper, Margo