

Where do we meet him?

John 21:1-14

April 14, 2013

Let me tell you about a few of my favorite places ...

La Grande Cascapédia, the Big Cascapedia River, flows south out of the Chic-Choc Mountains into la Baie des Chaleurs on the Gaspé Peninsula in Québec. It is a clear, cold, fast-flowing stream, entirely un-dammed, constantly in motion, flowing uninterrupted through an astonishingly beautiful steep-walled valley for one hundred kilometers, sixty miles, punctuated by dozens of rapids, some consisting of a single drop and others as much as a half-mile long, filled with waves and boulders.

I have been there many times, with Jane and Travis and Ray, leading groups of paddlers down the river. We would guide six or eight parent/teen pairs at a time, spending five days paddling the river and camping along its banks. The paddling was almost effortless, letting the fast current pull our loaded canoes downstream, until we encountered the rapids, of course, where there was much work to do and care to take!

As our canoes slipped over the river bottom, we could gaze through the crystal clear waters to watch the fascinating array of stones of all colors and shapes and types that filled the river and lined its beaches, and, then, suddenly, the long, slender silhouette of a forty-inch salmon would swim past our boats, headed in the opposite direction -- upstream!

I remember Porcupine Rapids, the longest and most difficult of the rapids, which we would come upon about midday on Wednesday, at the mid-point of our trip. And on Thursday evening, we always camped at Magic Kingdom. That was our name for an especially beautiful and mysterious bend in the river, marked with huge ledges and swirling currents and tumbling rapids. We set up our tents forty or fifty yards into the dark and still woods, falling asleep to the sounds of rushing water and the sudden, percussive, splash of a jumping salmon.

The Cascapedia River is a magical place and a favorite place. Just thinking about its currents and the steep mountains that hedge its banks quickens my pulse and fills my body and soul with yearning! I made lifelong friendships there. And I met Jesus there.

Dog Lake spreads out over 13,000 acres in the Canadian wilderness about nine hundred miles north of here. It is really a lake system, not a single lake, divided into numerous distinct bays, some relatively shallow and some hundreds of feet deep.

At 5:00 am, Cliff and I head out from camp, motoring through the cold, white mists rising off the surface of the lake, marveling at the first streaks of the rising sun, orange and yellow, coloring the skies about the treetops and reflected in the gently rippled waters before us. You don't have to just imagine the scene. You can see it for yourself, here, in Cliff's photo, on the cover of your bulletin!

We go there to fish, to catch walleye, and, boy, do we catch walleye! The last time we were there, Cliff and I caught two hundred and ninety-nine walleye between us in five and a half days of fishing! But we don't go there just to fish. We go for the companionship, with each other and with my brother-in-law, my nephew, Cleon, Bob, an uncle, a cousin.

And we go for the place: the stillness; the water, clear and cold; the air, warm and bright in the days, clear and cold in the evenings; the loons, sounding their eerie wail at night, swimming and diving near our boats in the mornings; a moose stepping from the dense woods on the shore of Eagle's Nest Bay, swimming slowly across the foot of the bay, pulling its lumbering body out of the water on the opposite bank.

Dog Lake is a magical place and a favorite place. Fish and loons and moose and mists have left a deep imprint on my memory and on my soul. I have shared many happy times there with family and friends. And I met Jesus there.

Prentiss Bay is a long, narrow bay situated on the north shore of Lake Huron, twenty miles northeast of Mackinac Island. At the head of its inner bay, a camp, named Cedar Campus, was sited in the early 1950's by Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, an ecumenical organization focused on evangelism and Christian discipleship among university students, built on the site of a former logging town.

I have been there every decade of my life -- with my parents when I was a toddler, attending family camps there as a teen, working there as a sailing instructor in my twenties, bringing my own young children there in my thirties.

Lynne spent much of her childhood living there, on site, as her father and mother managed the facility. Her father built many of the buildings that now grace its grounds.

The Great Lakes country is an awe-inspiring landscape, or should I say, waterscape? The expanse of water is vast, stretching to the horizon, sometimes still as glass, and sometimes raging. Cedar trees line the rocky shores and gigantic boulders dot the woods, left behind by receding glaciers.

We would walk through those woods, Lynne and I, to a place called Narnia, a secluded cove lined with huge rocks covered with orange lichen, where we swam and ate a picnic lunch and spent peaceful moments, enjoying being together and enjoying just being, just being in that wondrous place.

In the evenings, we would sit in Adirondack chairs on the porch of the rec hall and watch the sun set over the far end of the bay at 10:00 pm, and later, when it was completely dark, sometimes we would lay on the grassy point and watch the dazzling display of the aurora borealis, the northern lights.

Cedar Campus is a magical place and a favorite place. It is almost a home away from home to me, and it was home to Lynne. I met my wife there. Our wedding was held there. And I met Jesus there.

Where have you met Jesus?

The disciples met Jesus by a lake, on the shores of Lake Tiberias, also known as Lake Galilee. There were seven of them -- Peter and Thomas and Nathanael and John and James and two others. Peter said he was going fishing and the rest of them went with him.

The lake was a well-known and favorite place to them, at least four of them had been fishermen before leaving their boats and nets to follow Jesus. But since Jesus' death, their lives had become rather aimless and uncertain. They didn't know what to do. So, why not ... go fishing!

They did go fishing. They fished all night, but caught nothing, but then, as the sun was rising, Jesus stood at the water's edge ...

This is one of my favorites scenes in all of the gospels! I'm sure you know why: water, fishing, the dim light of early morning, the beach, a charcoal fire. But why did Jesus meet them there? You know why! The answer is obvious, too obvious. Jesus met them there, because that is where they were! Jesus meets us where we are. Jesus comes looking for us. He doesn't wait for us to come looking for him.

Where are you?

Are you in a new and strange and forbidding place, taking care of a parent, or a spouse, who had always taken care of you? Jesus will meet you there.

Are you facing a major transition in your life -- graduation, a new job, a new baby, a wedding? Jesus will meet you there.

Are you stuck, stuck with a job you don't like, stuck in a relationship you can't seem to mend, stuck with a faith that seems more about duty than about joy? Jesus will meet you there.

Jesus meets people where they are. He met Bartimaeus by the side of the road, a Samaritan woman at the well where she came to draw water, a crazy man out among the caves where he wandered screaming and cutting himself. He met them where they were, as they were, and he touched them there. He gave each of them what they needed -- for their bodies, for their souls, for their lives. Jesus doesn't come among us to call us out of this world into another place, a better place. Jesus comes to us in this world, to make us better, to make it better.

Jesus met people where they were, but he didn't go everywhere. He didn't travel far. He had his favorite places: in Jerusalem, a garden; in Bethany, the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus; and the lake. Almost the entirety of Jesus' ministry of teaching and healing, of proclaiming to people the good news that the kingdom of God is at hand, was done by the lake: in the towns along the lake, on its beaches, on the bluffs overlooking the lake, out on the lake in boats.

Jesus met the seven disciples by the lake because that's where they were, but it is eminently clear that he is at home there. Jesus is very comfortable in that setting. He tells them where to fish. He starts the fire. He brings the bread. He cooks the breakfast over the fire and eats it with them on the beach. If it is a well-known environment to them, it is also well-known to him. It is one of his favorite places.

Where do we meet him? We meet Jesus where we are.

And where are we? We are here ... on this earth. God comes to us here. Jesus meets us here, on this earth. This is our meeting place. This is our home. This is his home.

Why wouldn't we want to take care of our home? Why wouldn't we want to take care of his home? This is where we live. This is where he lives. And this is where he invites us to go with him ... here, in our -- in his -- favorite place.