

I come to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

There's a lot going on today. Today is Earth Day (and for those seeking an Earth Day worship experience I recommend you head to Holy Trinity/West Central Episcopal Mission tonight at 6pm). Today is Camp Cross Day. Today is Blood Drive Day. Today is Yoga at the Cathedral Day. And, today is Good Shepherd Day. This specific Gospel passage from John is a recurring passage that we have the privilege of hearing at the very least once a year, and if it's not from John, hearing variations on the theme more times during the year through the other gospels. It's an important passage because it establishes a sense of connection and relationship in a very clear manner, while still setting Jesus apart from what is expected, setting Jesus apart from what people think they know of the role he is about to describe. One of the key lines for me in this gospel passage is "I know my own and my own know me," and not only this but that this is derived from the power of the reality contained in the words immediately following, "just as the Father knows me and I know the Father." This is a powerful reality to behold, a powerful reality to experience, a powerful reality that gives life for we are known.

I first encountered the reality that I am known, and not only that I am known, but that I know this because I know my savior, at Camp Cross. I first attended Camp Cross during a family camp weekend in 1994, and then started attending as a camper in 1996. I have attended as a camper, served as a counselor, served on staff, volunteered in the kitchen, volunteered during labors of love, served as clergy and resource, not to mention returning as an adult camper, and performing multiple baptisms and even officiating a wedding at Camp. From 1996 until 2012 I didn't have a summer where I didn't spend at

least one weekend out at Camp Cross, and I picked that streak back up in 2015. I tell you this history, this long list of ways I've been at Camp, to stress that I have done all this not because I love the beauty of the property on Lake Coeur d'Alene, or the deep life-long friendships I've made, no I do all of this because I'm trying in some small way to pay back the great gift I received (and truly continue to receive) by attending Camp Cross. For it was at Camp Cross that the depth of the message, the ministry, the example of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, was made real, was made tangible, was truly made known, and where I in turn was able to see that I also was seen, was loved, was known.

But, it's not like there was a particular "A-Ha!" moment in my experience at Camp Cross. There was no earth-shattering realization for me. Instead, it was a combination of all of the little pieces that go into that special place that constantly and continually exposed me to this reality that "I know my own and my own know me."

It was in deep philosophical and spiritual conversations while drifting along the waters of Lake Coeur d'Alene on a two hour leisurely canoe excursion, it was in exploring what it meant to be not just a person of faith but an Episcopalian with other people my age (an opportunity that simply did not exist for me in my hometown), it was in the closeness of friendships, loves gained and lost, games of bump played and camp-wide games dominated, it was in the stunning beauty of the created world come to life as the rising sun peeked over the hills on the other side of the lake, it was in good music, good food, and the thickness of a thin space, that all came together to form me, to shape me, to inspire my faith, inform my understanding of the world, and lead me on a winding path to where I am today. It was in all of this that I came to know Christ present in this world, to know Christ in

my brothers and sisters from every walk of life, every way of believing, every type of background and experience. And, it was in knowing Christ in this place, a place where it was safe to explore a reality of faith that ran counter-culture to what I heard from peers back home, to what I saw in the media, that I came to accept that Christ also knew me, that Christ would call me into a life that is informed by the faith that was so fundamentally shaped by Camp Cross.

I think it's fitting that Camp Cross Day falls on today, Earth Day. Earth Day is not simply about acknowledging the importance of this Earth that we have been gifted with, that we have been charged to steward, to shepherd, but in our religious context, Earth Day is about how we take on the mantle of saving this Earth, preserving its places of beauty, defending it against human interests, fighting for its right to thrive and flourish, because water is a gift from God, a gift that we have a very deep connection to.

My television hero is a world-class fisherman who had a show on Animal Planet called *River Monsters*, where he would seek out "fresh water killers" and try to catch as large an example as possible for the purpose of research and greater understanding of sometimes mysterious species. His newest show airing each Sunday at 9pm for the next few weeks, is called *Jeremy Wade's Mighty Rivers*, wherein Wade is traveling to 6 of the most important rivers in the world and bringing to light the reality that these rivers are very near the brink of irreversible death. In the most recent episode Wade spoke to a truly spiritual connection he has to the water, and I couldn't help but be struck because we too are forever connected to water in our baptism. If we can't fight for the health of our

naturally occurring waters, we will literally die with them, physically and spiritually. And, in this I can't help but think of the reality of the natural waters in our region, at Camp Cross.

For too long our natural waters were polluted by the waste of mining for metals and minerals. We have superfund sites less than 2 hours from this very spot. Our very own Spokane River is of questionable quality due to pollutants from outside sources, man-made sources. We have to do our part to fight for our waterways, to demand action for continued clean up, for as close a return as possible to a quality that existed before we came along and took advantage for our own ends, forgetting that short-term payoffs would have long-term consequences.

The centrality of water in our sacramental life should inspire us in local, national, global efforts to reverse the damage we can. The centrality of water to the experience of Camp Cross is simply another reason to acknowledge the power we have to enact real change. When we do baptisms at Camp Cross we don't have to bless the water like we do here in our baptismal font, because running water, living water, is already a blessing from God, a blessing that we should fight for the health, vitality, and life of. If we are known by Christ, if we know Christ, then we must also know that this creation is our responsibility to shepherd. A reality that should be clear from our scriptures, a reality that is clear when you experience the gift of creation in a place like Camp Cross.

The foundational formation of my life was, is, Camp Cross. And it really shouldn't be a surprise. A fun statistic for you to take away today: youth who go to summer camp are three times more likely to be involved in church as adults. And this is because camp is where you are exposed to the truths of our faith. Camp is where you are exposed to the

importance of our call to follow the good shepherd, to acknowledge that we are both known and that we know. Camp is where Christ is fully realized in a hug with a friend you see once a year, a peaceful song around the campfire, a connection to the body of the church that is bigger than yourself, bigger than the handful of kids (if you're even that lucky) that you share this Episcopal journey with back home.

My experience of Camp Cross is mirrored by friends I've made throughout the years across this Episcopal Church, telling stories of formation at Kanuga or Camp Allen or Shrinemont or Paradise Point or any of the other number of Episcopal youth camps. It's even mirrored by those who attended faith camps from other traditions. Camp is powerful, camp is formative, camp is transformational. We have the blessing to have a camp in Camp Cross in our backyard. We have the blessing to send our children and youth to a place that has touched and continues to touch so many. We have the blessing to go back or go for the first time as youth or adults, to experience Camp Cross for that first time or anew, whether it be as a volunteer at a labor of love, attending a youth or adult camp, attending a family camp, or simply attending one of the open house worship days. If you truly want to see how the next generation of shepherds are being formed, look no further than Camp Cross. If you want to see how foundational water is to our experience of creation and faith, look no further than Camp Cross. If you want to know Christ and accept that you are known by Christ, come to Camp Cross this summer.

Amen.