

"Still fishing"

Ps 8, 2 Cor 13: 11-13, Mt 28: 16-20

I want to circle back for a moment to last Sunday's service so as not to leave those of us who worshiped here together misinformed. Fishing isn't just a Meyer-brothers thing. For those of you who weren't with us, Meyer is my mother's family name.

When I was a little girl, my father (certainly NOT a Meyer Brother) would take me fishing on Sunday afternoons. Before heading out to our favorite pond, we would mine for nightcrawlers and buy some minnows for our bait bucket. Then we'd load our fishing rods into his car along with a tackle box and picnic basket head out. Once my dad and I got to the pond, we'd stake our claim on a large rock, pull out our fishing gear and snacks (not necessarily in that order) and get ready for a couple of hours of nothing. First, we'd thread a bobber out on the thin fishing line and tie a sinker somewhere farther down. My dad would sing sappy songs, like "Try to Remember the Kind of September" while we scooped worms out of the bucket and looped them around a hook. Then we'd sit for an hour or so, watch the fish dart around our lines and catch up on the week (we usually only saw each other on the weekends). If you're a dad who's ever taken his little girl out fishing for a expedition, you know that fishing for us was as much about the Oreos, sunshine and being together as it was about catching anything.

We want to be close to the ones we love. We want to spend time with them, talk with them, get to know their deepest, best, funniest or most troublesome thoughts. We want to please them, create good memories with them, help keep them safe.

I think that's how it is with God. God wants to be close to us. God wants to talk with us. God, our Father, wants us to share our deepest, best, funniest, or most troublesome thoughts with him. God wants to please us and help us to have good memories. God wants us to be safe. But it seems that a lot of us just don't really make the effort to spend this time with God, too.

We might pop off a quiet prayer if the going gets tough, or list a few things we'd like out of the next day or the next chapter of our life. We might sit alone and wonder aloud if there is a God when things don't turn out the way we expect or when we believe that we (or someone we love) don't get what we deserve. But aside from a quick conversation that breaks through the clutter of our own ranting or raging a lot of us barely attempt to connect with God. We believe in God, but we don't seem to have a desire to get personal with God as a Father at all. It's as if we either don't feel the need to *have* a close relationship with the Lord in the first place, or that we feel the need to keep him in that place we read about – some grand and glorious place so far away on every dimension (spiritual, emotional and physical) - that we feel like we *can't* have an intimate relationship whether we want one or not.

Architectural Digest landed in our mailbox this week. I was about as drawn to the cover as its editors could've ever wanted me to be. It held a fantastic picture of Elizabeth Taylor, draped in something glamorous and white and wearing a large, gold cross. The heading read, "The Private World of Elizabeth Taylor: An Exclusive Tour of the Star's Bel Air Estate." It struck me, as I thumbed through the magazine, how so many people still want to know this celebrated star, even now that she's gone. We want a personal look into her home to see the pictures of her family, the paintings on her wall, the knit throw that she piled upon herself as she sat with friends through the night. We want to know what she drank and where she wrote personal notes. We want to know what her pool looked like and the shape of her dining room table and how her gardens were designed. We look at these made for movie,

picture perfect settings and imagine the incredible conversations she had with all sorts of people of a certain stature that seems well beyond our own. A lot of us might try to imagine what it might've been like to actually *meet* Elizabeth Taylor, or get to know her on *some* level, or maybe (just maybe) have the chance to become her friend. But we couldn't ever meet her or really get to know her or ever be her friend.

For super stars and all sorts of people like them, it's not possible to really ever get to know them. Some, like Elizabeth Taylor and Robert Redford, or even Mitt Romney and Mahatma Gandhi, really are on a totally different plane than most of us ever have the opportunity to board. Some of the people we'd like to be near are now for certain dead. But some of them are right beside us or closer to us than our own skin yet we feel such distance! So every now and then we just take a look inside of a magazine article or try a family scrapbook or maybe even the Bible and glean an idea or two of what makes a super star glisten because to us he's the most illustrious person to walk the planet.

I would like to think that our triune God has "made our list" of those we'd like to know quite personally. I'd like to think that we all want to have a friend in Jesus to relate to as if he were fully alive in our world, walking beside us as a personal friend, enjoying a meal, sitting on a rock and sharing Oreos and a fishing line - spending time with us in made-for-movies settings as well as *not so* picture perfect ones. I want to believe that each one of us not only desires a closeness with God but has come to experience a great swell in our souls that comes from having such a powerful love for the Lord that it takes our breath away to know that the creator of heaven and earth who made the moon and the stars is not only mindful of us but cares for every fiber of our being.

I know it's possible, but I also know that it's nearly impossible to convince someone *else* of the possibility of a feeling so profound. And as much as we might take great strides to get to this level of closeness to God, I realize that this can feel like an elusive ideal that we don't quite know how to get our minds - let alone our hearts - around.

They say that how we feel about God reflects our worship of God. In a kind of circular way, how we worship God not only *reflects* our relationship with God but also helps *form* our relationship with God. The ritual acts we perform in honor of our Lord are formative acts that shape our relationship with our Father, his Son and the Holy Spirit. Over time we internalize our myriad acts of adoration and praise, confession and reconciliation, thanksgiving and service to our Lord. Over time, the accumulated expression of all the worshipful ways we live and move and have our being with God *become* our relationship with God.

The more we intentionally praise and adore God, the more we have praise-filled and adoring feeling about God and the more praise-filled and adoring our relationship is with him. The more we intentionally confess our transgressions, the more reconciled our relationship with God will be, especially through those experiences of life that make us wonder why a loving God seems to be so far away. The more we thank God for the food that we have to eat, the shelter that we've been given to keep us warm and dry, the educational experiences we've had, the friendships and family members in our lives, our good health or the medical care we receive, the hopes and dreams that fill our hearts, the more we'll feel grateful to our God who is the source of all blessings. The more we feel grateful for all that God has supplied, the more we will want to praise our Father and serve him with all of our being, like we might praise and serve and family member or friend we feel especially grateful to have in our lives.

These intentional acts of praise and adoration, confession, thanksgiving and service are worshipful acts that not only *reflect* how we feel about God, but *become how* we grow in our relationship with the Lord. The more we grow in relationship with God, the closer we become as parent and child. And if this is not reward enough, the closer we become in our relationship with God as child of the most awesome parent imaginable, the more we come to understand God's creative purpose for our lives.

The more we come to understand God's creative purpose for our lives, the more it will feel like we are living our lives to the fullest.

This is cause for celebration and this is cause for praise.

Sometimes, we feel a kind of push me/pull you with people we encounter in our personal lives or even from a distance. We experience them up close or from afar then put them someplace between adoration or condemnation, often depending upon only our initial encounter whether it's a personal introduction or a television interview. Sometimes, we feel this same sort of push me/ pull you with God. We experience the Lord up close or from afar then put him someplace between adoration or condemnation – maybe it's even disregard, often based upon an early experience. Through ritual acts of our every day lives, not simply ritual acts of worship on a Sunday morning, but ritual acts of conversation and contemplation that are filled with praise or thanksgiving, confession or service, questioning and even judgment, ritual acts of true relationship like we would have with our closest friend, we solidify our relationship with God and become the people God wants for the world to know. It's in the juxtaposition between our conversations with the earthly God in our midst and conversations with the eternal God in the heavens that we experience the fullness of life. In this way, any afternoon outing with the Lord becomes a kind of family outing like a father-daughter trip to a favorite fishing hole where the time spent is more important than the catch of the day.

There's a public park near where I live that's alive with family reunions and picnics on weekend afternoons. I just love to drive by and watch how much fun they seem to be having. Really, I do, in a kind of gooberish way. Balloons, family t-shirts, badminton...grill going....it's all good. At one, particular park in Eagle Rock Reservation, there's a horseshoe pit. What a great game! You just toss your horseshoe toward a stake in the ground seeing how close you can get, or – better yet – seeing if you can ring it around the stake.

But the greatest part of playing horseshoes is like the greatest part of a growing relationship with God. You'll feel tremendous joy from getting a ringer but you don't need a ringer to score. Because no matter how far off base, how tired you get from life, how close or how far you land at the end of each day, you can always be a winner just by trying because our God, who's sitting firmly near us like a stake in the ground is always with us just waiting for us to get closer. Because as we've said before, Christianity is not a spectator sport and neither is our relationships with God.

May each of us continually worship our God and Father, appreciating each of these worshipful acts as opportunities to grow closer and closer to the Lord. May the accumulated expression of all of the ways that we worship the Lord create an intense, personal relationship with God. And in growing our personal relationship with God, may we also grow into understanding God's creative purpose for our lives and live into life in the fullest to God's glory. Thanks be to God. And Happy Father's Day.