

**Twenty-Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time Cycle B**  
Numbers 11:25-29 James 5:1-6 Mark 9:38-43,45,47-48

This is a “Timber Bell”. Our son Michael gave it to me for my birthday. He has one just like it that he uses when he goes mountain biking, so that he doesn’t surprise a bear along the trail. Michael lives in Colorado, and I guess the bears out there really don’t like surprises! I told him, yes, that may be true, but what if the bear thinks it is a dinner bell! My “Timber Bell” has become my church bell, but I am getting ahead of myself, and I had better begin again with an explanation.

I was flat on my back in Mary Greeley Hospital for five days in June. A disk in my back ruptured and made some nerves really angry. So, I had to use a walker to get around for a couple of weeks after I got home. One day I realized that the relief that the walker provided was due to the bent over position that I assumed as I put weight on the hand grips.

Then it dawned on me, that was exactly the position that I am in when I ride my bike, so I pushed the walker out to the garage and hopped on my bike. Or rather, I lowered the bike down to the floor and kind of stepped into it. I rode 14 miles that day in a little over an hour. I was almost giddy with excitement! After being cooped up for almost a month, I was truly joyful to have so much freedom of movement again.

Father Jim anointed me in the hospital, and I believe that is when my healing began. It is kind of like the first reading when God took some of the spirit from Moses and gave it to the seventy elders. Now God took some of the spirit that rested on Father Jim and gave it to me. I also believe that God likes it when we cooperate with his Spirit to complete the good work he has begun in us, so I decided to ride my bicycle every day. It is easier to keep a daily routine than the minimum workout schedule of three days a week that many physical trainers recommend.

It is not safe to ride a bike on the road any more with all of the distracted drivers, so I ride to Ada Hayden on the bike trail and do laps around the lake. I now ride every day for at least 20 miles. I know that I need to control my diet as well so, I made it a rule that if I have a few too many calories the day before, I will do my penance by riding 10 extra miles. I am one of those people who live to eat, so am really racking up the miles! Sometime in October I will pass the 2000-mile mark.

I like to begin my ride in the dark with my new headlight and tail light. That way I can watch the sun come up. I like how all the rabbits get spooked by the light coming at them and so, they take off running beside me and cut across my path a couple of feet in front my wheel. I like to imagine that they are the rabid fans lining the road on Alpe d’huez during Tour de France. I always wonder why more of the riders don’t crash on that stage.

The lake has become a real oasis of life this year with all the rain. All the vegetation is so beautiful, alive and green. It wouldn’t be too much of a stretch to imagine it a Garden of Eden. One day I saw an eagle flying all the way across the lake just two feet above the water looking for breakfast. Once in a while I am greeted by several deer as they cross the path first thing in the morning to get a cool drink of water from the lake. As my bike carves elegant curves around the corners, I ponder God in the very act of creating, as the sun breaks over the trees in the East and paints the sky and the lake with light.

There is often no wind that early in the morning, and the lake is as smooth as glass. When the fish jump out of the water they leave perfect concentric circles that travel across the lake. I look up and see that happening over and over again all the way across the lake.

As the waves intersect with each other, I ponder how our life stories are all connected in that same way. Everything we do has either a helpful or harmful effect on the people that God puts into our lives. I believe that we would all be a lot kinder to each other if we could recognize the beauty and the source of unity we all share with our common home, each other and therefore with God Himself.

Now you can see how Ada Hayden has become my cathedral, and my “Timber Bell” has become my church bell. Before I got the bell, I would shout “On your left” as I approached the walkers. Some of them would be startled, and they didn’t always figure out which way was left as they stumbled around on the path, so I was looking for a better way. The bell comes in handy because it gently announces that a bike is approaching and they should move to the right a little, or at least hold their line.

Nobody likes to be startled, especially when we are alone with our thoughts. Sometimes we can react more like a Colorado bear than a person with dignity. It is easy to think the worst when someone surprises you, so I made it a point to thank everyone when they move over and to say good morning to them as I pass. Those words “thank you” and “good morning” have a real power to change discord into friendship, and we should make it a habit to use them more often. With all the super-heated politics of the time and all of the tribal culture wars that are going on all around us, wouldn’t it be nice if more people would stop trying to make a point and instead try to make a friend.

Both the first reading from Numbers and today’s Gospel of Mark make it a point to reveal that the Spirit of God came to rest even on those who were not in the camp. That should tell us there is far more than one way to God. As Miguel de Cervantes, the most celebrated figure in Spanish literature once said, “Many are the roads by which God carries his own to heaven.” No man or church has a monopoly on salvation. God is bigger than that. God gave us a beautiful garden to live in, and asked us to tend and to keep it. All people share in that common dignity given by God; therefore, all people deserve to be treated with respect.

Deacon Alan Christy

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