
Welcome Home Again

Cathedral Times

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by The Rev. George Maxwell Jr., Vicar & Canon for Congregational Life

"Have you ever actually been here before?"

We were several days into a weeklong trip into the Bob Marshall wilderness area in Montana. We were getting used to the breathtaking landscapes, pristine streams and curious wildlife that seemed to appear around every bend in the trail. We were even getting used to carrying everything on our backs, hydrating all of our food and sleeping on the ground.

We, however, were having trouble with our guide's seeming inability to tell us exactly how far we needed to go the next day and exactly how high we would be when we got there. Hikes described as eight miles the night before turned out to be twelve miles on our GPS trackers the next day. Elevation gains of about one thousand feet turned out to be almost fifteen hundred.

One morning, as we paused to consider which way to approach the peak we had set out to climb, one of us put the group's growing frustration into words. "Have you ever actually been here before?" We all laughed.

Our guide has written books about this wilderness area. He grew up there, as did his father. He had actually used this trail years before in a course he taught on wilderness policy at the University of Montana in nearby Missoula. Yet, the more I listened to him talk about this wilderness, the more I realized that his answer to the question might have been "" "No."

Some of us wanted the information because we thought it would help us prepare for the rigors of the next day. Some of us wanted the information because we were compiling our own statistical summary of the trip""miles traveled, altitude gained, peaks bagged, and animals spotted. But, our guide wasn't interested in those things.

Our guide didn't seem to be as interested in mastering the wilderness as he was in being mastered by it. And that experience seemed to depend on his paying particular attention to what had changed since the last time he was there.

He was constantly scanning the hillsides for clusters of wildflowers or patches of huckleberries. He insisted at stopping at each stream to see how the melting of the winter snow had altered its course. He never passed evidence of animals on the trail without looking to see what they were eating and where they were going.

And he had no qualms about changing our plans""adding impromptu side trips or finding another camp site""based on what he saw. He knew that, in many ways, he had never been there before. And his awareness meant that we all experienced a wilderness that we might have missed if we had focused

only on how many miles we had to go or how many feet we had to climb.

"Have you ever actually been here before?"

Homecoming Sunday is scheduled for August 20 at the Cathedral.

Homecoming Sunday, or Rally Day as we used to call it, marks the beginning of our program year. The Atrium will be decorated with images of our "deep and wide" theme. Classes for children, youth and adults will resume. People will be coming back to church after their summer break.

Many things will be familiar to you the greetings from old friends, the majesty of the Nave, and the intimacy of the chapels. Take comfort in them. This is still your spiritual home. But, I invite you to pay particular attention to what is new.

Take a moment to review the new Cathedral Handbook, or stick your head into the Cathedral Book Store, or play around on our new website. Consider participating in a new guild, study group, mission council, demographic group, prayer group, committee or class. Who knows, you may find a Cathedral you have never seen before!

Welcome home, again.