
The Journey is Beside Us, Not Always Up Front

An article from the *Cathedral Times* by Dean Sam Candler

Last Sunday's scriptures presented us with lessons we have all heard for a long time, whether we are religious or not!

Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence
or stand in the place of the great;
for it is better to be told, 'Come up here',
than to be put lower in the presence of a noble. (Proverbs 25:6-7)

When Jesus noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable. 'When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, "Give this person your place", and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, "Friend, move up higher"; then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. (Luke 14:7-10)

Yes, whether we have grown up religious or now, we have heard similar advice. "Don't always rush to the front of the line!" "Be polite!" "Wait your turn!" "Don't take the seat beside the host until she asks you to!" Why is it, then, that we so often find ourselves forgetting that advice?

A few weeks ago, I was on a canoe trip, into Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario. That area is almost completely comprised of water: long stretches of meandering streams and rivers, and wide windy lakes. There are a few hiking trails, but the huge park (larger than Prince Edward Island) is really made for canoe paddling trips. One can paddle and camp in there for weeks.

I found myself in the middle of one of the canoes – not in the bow, where I grew up as a child looking out way ahead, and not in the stern, which position I assumed when older. No, I was letting my daughter and her boyfriend paddle those positions. I had to admit that the middle seat began uncomfortably for me. My legs were a bit cramped, for one; but, more seriously for me, I couldn't see like I am accustomed to seeing! While coming around so many curves in the river, I couldn't be the one peering around every bend for whatever animal or scene would appear next. If I looked straight ahead, all I could see was my daughter's back!

We joked about it, for sure. Someone told the story of a dog they took along on a similar trip; that dog insisted on sitting in canoe's bow, ahead of the paddler, in the lead boat of however many canoes were on the trip. If he was not in that primary lead position, the dog would whimper and whine the whole time, distressingly so.

Fortunately, for me, something triggered my patience, and I accepted my place in the boat with investigation and curiosity rather than frustration. Without really having to paddle at all, I got out my binoculars and noticed shoreline plants, and deep views of spruces and firs in the woods. I saw bullfrogs and sparrows like I would not otherwise have seen.

In other words, along life's journeys, there is just as much to be seen along the sides of the trip as there is out front. The same phenomenon occurs when one takes hikes along single-file trails in the woods. Only one person walks first. The rest

of us actually have more time seeing the plants and curiosities along the edges of the path.

At the dinner table, at your next great party or event, or even in a church pew, it is not necessarily the one up front who is the occasion of grace for us. It is the person right beside us, wherever we are sitting. There may be no more freeing occasion than to be freed from having to be up front – as either the object of attention, or as the person straining to see up front. For, God has created the entire journey, not just the front parts; God has something for us right where we are.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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