

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota
January 27, 2012

Psalm 19
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
Bible Camp Sunday
Voyageur's Lutheran Ministry

ADULT MESSAGE

The old guy asked little Jimmy, "**What are you going to miss most about Outing when you move away?**" Ten year old Jimmy answered, "**Sunday school.**" "**What?**" I said later as the old fellow told me the story. "**Jimmy is the terror of our Sunday school!**" The old guy had nothing to do with our church or any church, but he knew that Jimmy did. He also knew that Jimmy's family was leaving town and that prompted his question. He too was surprised at Jimmy's answer. Jimmy came to Sunday school pretty much on his own, maybe occasionally catching a ride with one of our member families. His own parents pretty much lived in the bar and left Jimmy and his sister to run the town. Jimmy was a cut-up in class. He was always looking for attention. Teachers struggled to keep order whenever Jimmy was there.

So what's the deal? **I think that Jimmy met Jesus at Sunday school.** Or maybe it happened at **Bible camp** where he attended whenever someone would pay his way. Somehow that wandering kid felt loved and cared about even where he may not have always been so much wanted – Sunday school class, Bible camp, God's people trying to introduce the world to Jesus and his love for everybody, for everybody... When Jimmy left town, I'm hoping that he found another Sunday school and had more chances to go to Bible camp... I hope that today he knows how much Jesus loves and cares about him.

I was **so lucky.** I grew up deep in the north woods. I was raised in the embrace of tall pines, calling loons and the moon shimmering across the waters right out the back door of our house. I was **so fortunate.** My parents taught me to love and cherish the creation all around me. They taught me that God is the great creator and master artist behind it all. I was **so blessed.** My parents also taught me that God loves me and all people with an undying love. Even a cross and grave couldn't separate the people of this world and the God who died and rose again to forgive, heal, renew and give life to me and you and anybody who wants or needs life.

I could see God's handiwork all around me in the woods where I grew up. I can see God's handiwork all around me in the deer stand where I hunt each year. But it took my parents, Sunday school teachers and Bible camp counselors to help me to **see beyond God's HANDIWORK to God's LOVE for me.** God has **given us this amazing world** and God has **come to share it with us** in the most wonderful relationship there could ever be. **"For God so loved the world that he gave..."**

The first several verses of our Psalm for today teach that all of creation declares the glory of God. **"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky proclaims its maker's handiwork. One day tells its tale to another, and one night imparts knowledge to another. Although they have no words or language, and their voices are not heard, their sound has gone out into all lands, and their message to the ends of the world, where God has pitched a tent for the sun."** Did you know that God goes **camping** - **"pitched a tent for the sun?"** I know that I run into God all the time when I am camped out in one or another of our state parks. And my wife and I, over the years, have often celebrated with our kids God's amazing work in creation.

As marvelous as is the gift of God's creation, the gift of God's love is far greater. The Psalmist starts the psalm out with **nature singing God's praise**. Then the Psalmist goes on to say that **God's commandments sing God's praise**. And **then Jesus came and invited you and me to sing God's praise** – for creation, for love, acceptance, forgiveness, hope and new life in Christ. **The commandments** put nature's message of praise into **words that we can hear** and own for ourselves. **Jesus** puts **God's praise into a daily walk** with you and me and all of God's children.

That brings us back to **Bible camp**. This is Bible Camp Weekend here at First Lutheran. We are corporate members of **Voyageur's Lutheran Camp Association**. We own two camps – **Hiawatha** in Grand Rapids and **Vermilion** in Cook. These camps are **beautiful treasures** in the midst of God's great north woods. And they are **staffed by beautiful children of God** with a love and passion for God, creation, kids, campers and camping.

Jesus goes to camp! I have seen Jesus moving to love and embrace kids at camp many times. I have experienced God's love at camp myself, in my own kids and now in your kids! At Bible camp kids, adults, families – have the wonderful opportunity to experience the best of God's amazing creation

– campfires, swimming, outdoor games, studying the creation close up and personal. Add to that wonderful stories, skits, Bible studies applied to real life, exciting songs and worship shared with all sorts of other kids and energized camp counselors. Every year I beg and plead with kids and families to attend Bible camp. They sometimes go kicking and screaming. Then, by the end of their week, the kids don't want to come home. I think they met Jesus. And I know that they met all kinds of other children of God who have helped to add newness and zest to being Christian together.

There is a story about a Norwegian bishop who was visiting a remote island off the coast of Norway. He had come to confirm a class of young Christians. In preparation for confirmation, the bishop went down the line of students asking each about their faith. One of the students had a learning disability. The bishop asked him if he **could recite the Apostles' Creed?** "**No**," the boy shook his head; he couldn't do that. "**Well, can you tell me what the third commandment is?**" No, he couldn't do that. "**Can you recite the Lord's Prayer?**" No, he couldn't do that either. Finally, getting exasperated, the bishop angrily asked, "**Well, do you know Jesus?**" "**Yes, yes, yes**," the boy excitedly smiled and shook his head. The bishop confirmed him. The **boy knew Jesus and that was good enough**. As a matter of fact, that is the **best** thing that anyone can know. **And that's what we do here**, in Sunday school, at Camp Hiawatha, at Camp Vermilion – we try to introduce our kids to Jesus.

Our camps take the best of God's creation, mix in a variety of God's children and then wrap it all up in Jesus. I'm going to keep going there. I'm going to keep begging and pleading to get others, adults and kids, to go there too. I hope that we will do more and more confirmation ministry through our camps. I hope that we will do more and more adult/family retreats. I dream of the day that we will have so much money donated for **camperships** that we can say **every one of our kids gets to go to camp** at least one time for free. **Because we know that they will meet Jesus there**. Are your kids going to camp this year? Are you?

God bless our camps. Thanks be to God for our camps and all those folks who make them such special, Godly places. God inspire us to **utilize** our camps. God empower us to **strongly support** our camps. Jesus visit us in our church, our Sunday school, our confirmation and milestone ministries. **Jesus visit us** where we live, work and play every day. And **help us to make room for Jimmy too**. Thanks be to God. Amen.

