

Pastor's Letter

I spent some time on a frozen lake not long ago. As a rule, I find ice to be exquisitely beautiful, but not entirely trustworthy. Ice is all too temporary – an expanse of hardness that will, at some point, revert to its liquid and less secure form. Woody Allen once remarked: “I don’t mind the idea of dying. I just don’t want to be there when it happens.” I just don’t want to be there when ice decides to “revert”, especially when just beneath the ice lies hundreds of feet of water – cold water.

But for a time, I was able to overcome my trust issues and venture forth onto the ice. Aside from Jesus and Peter, few folks have had the pleasure of standing in the middle of a lake to take in the view. It’s quite a thing. What’s most immediately striking to me is the flatness of the scene: thousands of acres of absolutely level surface, without obstructions, without exception. Given humanity’s penchant for cluttering up space with buildings and billboards, such an expanse is rare. Thankfully, no one has yet devised a means of setting a mid-lake billboard. God help the boaters if they did.

Ice is notoriously lacking in friction – a boon to ice-boaters and a bane to walkers. Even the most agile will find ice-walking to be treacherous. Nothing can be taken for granted. It is quite literally “one step at a time”, placed carefully and thoughtfully. The irony is that one misstep can require even more ice...upon returning home. So caution rules the day.

I’ve rarely found this stretch of lake ice to be heavily populated. Generally speaking, issues of footing...and freezing...tend to suppress the crowds. This is a place of solitude...and quiet. Motorists are few and far between...so that noise is kept to a minimum – at most, the sound of the wind, sweeping across unhindered.

Warning: Embedded in this ice is a metaphor! I find that ice speaks to me of the spiritual journey on several levels: First of all, the journey is a solitary one. Though friends certainly make the trip more pleasant and encourage us along the way, no one else can take our journey for us. It is up to us to place our foot, to take the next step.

Secondly, this journey calls for trust, that we will be sustained, held. Here’s where community is invaluable. We are emboldened as we watch others risk...and reap. In the case of the frozen lake, if somebody parks their Pontiac on the ice, it’s a good bet that it’s thick enough to hold me. The community can instill trust through its collective experience. (Frankly, I’ll take a good augur over a Pontiac as a “tool of discernment”, but that’s just my preference!)

Third, the journey affords tremendous visibility. The “path less taken” offers a vista both far and wide...and sometimes deep – albeit, as Paul the Apostle put it, sometimes “through a glass darkly.”

Clearly, the journey onto an icy lake isn’t for everyone, but even those who choose not to step forth are able to access the experience through the accounts of others who do. There are similar “chroniclers” for the spiritual journey. Names like Henri Nouwen, Teresa of Avila, Joan Chittester, and Gerald May come to mind, among others. I recommend their accounts of their journeys, perhaps enjoyed from the comfort of a nice, warm easy chair – far removed from any ice! We can learn much vicariously!

You and I might prefer to restrict our experience of ice to small cubes in a tall glass of tea. But the journey of the Spirit is available to all. This Lenten season, I recommend taking a step or two out onto that vast plain of fresh, clear open expanse...to see just where the Spirit may lead us.

Deep Presence to you all!
Tim