
Hay Bales and Images of Christ

**A sermon by the Rev. Nate Huddleston
Proper 7 - Year A**

My grandpa's truck smelled like dirt and chain-saw oil, and alfalfa straw mingled with melting fishing lures cooking in the hot Oklahoma sun in the summer. I smell it whenever I think of him. The truck was two-tone Ford, a rust dusted white cap over a faded copper body. I used to sit in the back bed with the rusted hay piercer that was probably attached during the Oklahoma land run. My job was to guide and direct the hay piercer to a perfect bulls-eye as we moved bails of hay like chess pieces around the farm in Perry, Oklahoma. Some of my favorite moments are the bumpy rides in the back of that truck, but not for the smell or the three pounds of perspiration that seemed to slide off me as the day wore on, but for my time spent with my Papa.

For most people at this time in our history it was being all about MIKE (Michael Jordan that is)! But not for me, for me I wanted to be like Papa. I didn't need to run faster, or jump higher or win championships. Instead, I wanted to be like the man who was sure of who he was! I wanted to be the calm presence he always radiated. I wanted to be able to remember names with unflinching certainty. I wanted to have the kindness so thick you'd have to brush it away from your face just to walk. Most of all, I also wanted to be able to fish like him! Papa is the ultimate 'fish whisperer' the one who always catches more than his limit so that he could share his spoils with us mere humans. Papa was my teacher and I was his willing disciple (and still am).

In the midst of Father's Day and the scripture this morning reminding us that it is enough "for a disciple to be LIKE the teacher", I find myself fondly remembering the lessons my Papa has taught me. With inexhaustible patience he taught me how to tie a knot on the end of a fly rod. I remember that as we walked, he would suddenly begin to hum a happy tune to no one in particular, mainly to himself, as if some happiness inside him could not stay there, but just had to burst forth. Most of all, I remember the way he treated others, even a difficult teenage grandson, with respect, dignity and honor. In some senses Papa was the first incarnation of what the image and likeness of Christ looked like in flesh and blood. Before I ever decided to follow Jesus, as the gospel hymn says, I decided to follow Papa. I knew and still know that I will never be greater than my teacher but as Jesus reminds us: it is enough "for a disciple to be LIKE the teacher", but like my teacher I want to be!

For many people today believe that being a Christian is about ascribing to this doctrine, dogma, or liturgical style. It's about this cause, program, or latest agenda. Don't get me wrong all of those are important, some are even essential for our well-being and continued survival as humanity. But in the end, it's not about any of that. It is about being like Jesus. Jesus is the model, the teacher, the example of what it means to be in love with God and with each other. Jesus can never be reduced to a statement, a value, a doctrine or an agenda. Jesus is always a person which is all of those things and so much more.

I am not sure that my Papa could ever tell you what his mission, strategy, or tactics were. Papa never advocated a program or agenda. He just lived it. I learned more from his example and his way of being in the world than anything he ever said. I wanted to be like him because of who he was, not what he said.

The same can be said of being a follower of Jesus. It doesn't matter if you understand what it means to say that he was fully human and fully God or what it means to say that he is one with the Holy Spirit and God the Father. What matters is that you be like him in everything you do and say, every day, in every way. If you become a disciple of Jesus you will always be growing, learning, falling and failing, getting back and starting again. It is not the thriving that matters, it is the striving that is key.

I will never be the fish whisperer that Papa is, but I am going to try. You and I will never be Jesus, but we must try. Each of us must find our own way. Each of us has our own journey to travel. That's good news, but it also the hard news! No one else can do it for you. You have to decide if what to follow Jesus, to be his disciple, it will be hard work but eternally rewarding.

You have to decide if you are going to climb up into the rusted bed, of the truck with the smell of oil, alfalfa and fish so that you can spend a little with Jesus. It just might be some of the best days of your life. I have decided to be like Papa. I have decided to be like Jesus. What about you?

© *The Cathedral of St. Philip. All rights reserved.*