

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

The spirit moves in mysterious ways and, at times, catches us unawares. The Reverend Brian Cavanaugh demonstrates this with the following story:

“There was this very rich, Texan who threw a Texas-sized bash for his daughter. Now he was a very rich Texan with tens of thousands of acres of land, thousands of cattle, hundreds of producing oil wells, a large twenty-nine room mansion with a swimming pool, and a beautiful young daughter.

“For this party, he invited all the eligible young men of the county to meet his daughter. After the party had been going on for some time, he called everyone out to the pool for an announcement. He lined all the young men at one end of the Olympic-sized pool, which he had filled with snakes and alligators, and said, “The first one of you who jumps into the pool and swims to the other end, I will give him the choice of one million dollars, a thousand acres of choice land, or the hand of my daughter in marriage.

“No sooner were the words out of the Texan’s mouth when there was a splash at the far end and a streak through the water. A young man emerged, setting what must have equaled an Olympic record.

“The Texan approached the young man and asked if he wanted the million dollars? The man said, “No, sir.” Then he was asked if he wanted the thousand acres. Again the young man said, “No, sir.”

“Well then, son,” said the Texan, “you must want the hand of my lovely daughter in marriage?” “Thank you, but no, sir,” replied the young man. “Well then, just what is it that you do want?” “What I want, sir, is to know the name of the dude who pushed me in the pool!”

Fr. Cavanaugh admits that it is indeed a humorous tale but in life consider how the Holy Spirit calls us on...urges us, exhorts us, nudges us, and sometimes just pushes us into the pool of life...

In the Gospel reading from John, Jesus is preparing his disciples...and us...for that push, that nudge into the pool. Jesus tells us that “He will send the Spirit of truth to us. And He will set the record straight and guide us and nudge us down the right path. “When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”

All of us have been on our own unique life journeys; no two are alike. There are times when we reach a resting spot and have a moment to reflect and wonder “how” and “why” we have traveled on our particular road.

Last week, Aaron and I had lunch together and we spent time sharing some of our life experiences. I am afraid that I was more long-winded than Aaron and took a return visit to some

rough roads in my early career in mental health. As a result of the conversation, I found myself agitated and anxious and, upon returning home, began to dissect that period of my work, taking it apart piece by piece. After a time, it became apparent that I was looking at it through my eyes and putting my value on it, not Gods. I was still searching for the dude who pushed me into the pool...forgetting that is what needed to happen in order for me to achieve what the Holy Spirit had in mind.

Nudges into the pool of life. Here is another.

The Reverend Scott Kenefake tells of the time that he was listening to a Canadian Broadcasting Company program called *Tapestry*." The program's current host, Mary Hynes, was interviewing former chef, secular intellectual, skeptic, and journalist Sara Miles, about her unexpected--and inconvenient--conversion to Christianity when she entered a church on impulse in San Francisco one Sunday.

Miles was raised as an atheist and she was happily living an "enthusiastically secular life" as a restaurant cook and journalist, indifferent to religion at best. As she says in the Prologue to her book, *Take This Bread*, "I was certainly not interested in becoming a Christian.... Or, as I thought of it rather less politely, a religious nut."

"But as she entered the doors of St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco on a whim, she ate a piece of bread and took a sip of wine and found herself *radically transformed*.... At the age of 46 this was her first communion and it changed *everything*.

"This was the unexpected experience of Sara Miles, in San Francisco, the enthusiastic atheist, who had no intention of becoming a follower of Jesus, until she met him, as a living reality, in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. This was the nudge by the Holy Spirit that spun her into the deep end of the pool and this encounter changed her life forever.

"She started a food pantry and gave away literally tons of fruit and vegetables and cereal around the same altar where she first received communion. She then organized new pantries all over the city to provide hundreds of hungry families with free groceries each week. Without committees or meetings or even an official telephone number, she recruited scores of volunteers and raised hundreds of thousands of dollars."

An unexpected push propels us to places that we never dreamed of or planned for. And then, we look back, and wonder who the dude was that pushed us into the pool of life. That dude has a name and He is the Holy Spirit. The same spirit who participated in Creation; the same spirit who gave life to humanity and other creatures; the same spirit who endowed certain judges and warriors and prophets in a way that gave them extraordinary powers; and the same spirit that inspired Old Testament prophecy.

(At the 10:30 service) (And) this dude is the same spirit who will bring Ian Baker into contact with water, not as much as described in the earlier story, but water all the same. It will not be mere swimming pool water but water that will have been blessed and imbued with the Holy Spirit. Joan will bless the water with these words: "We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of Creation...In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit...we thank you, Father, for the water of

Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in His resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit.”

As Ian becomes a member of the Body of Christ, we too are reminded what our duties are to Ian, and to one another, and to the community at large. We are reminded of the gifts of the spirit that have been given to us, gifts that are not to be hidden away, but as Sara Miles discovered, to be shared with those whose journeys have taken them to dark and lonely and unforgiving places.

As Ian is received into the Body of Christ, we too experience our own baptism and the descending of the Holy Spirit as we were thrown into the pool of a life in Christ. In Baptism, we too are reminded of what God has given to us: “an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and love, and the gift of joy and wonder in all God’s works.”

And we are reminded of why that dude pushed us into the pool and we thank God for the nudge.

Amen