

The Field of Dreams and Closing the Gap

I have said before and will repeat again now that the most fundamental interpretation of Scripture is the life, activity, and organization of the believing community. Today, as this community of believers gathers to celebrate the Feast of St. John, we have as our texts the person of St. John the Baptist, our patron. His life, his witness, his story in our Scriptures are here with us today. And we have – as uncomfortable as it will make him – Fr. Ian Williams – whose presence here, as a priest, is a culmination of what can happen if we interpret the Scriptures through how we live as a church family. *Ian, this weekend we bear witness that the Gospel has taken shape in you uniquely for the good of Christ's Church in a new vocation that will begin in this parish with these people.* In other words, this morning we look to hear the good news of Jesus Christ in the lives of our patron saint and our new priest.

Though a week late to reflect on fatherhood, I have found myself contemplating the silence that existed between St. John and his father, Zechariah, while John was still in the womb. The story, which precedes today's Gospel reading, describes the angel Gabriel appearing to an old, childless priest with the news that his wife will bear a son who is to prepare the way for the Messiah of God. The priest's wife is also in her – what shall we call it? – golden years and so Zechariah does not believe God's plan. The angel responds to Zechariah's words of disbelief by telling him that he will be unable to speak until his son is born. So, there is much unsaid between Zechariah and John during those first 9 months.

Could it be that this is often the way of things between fathers and sons? I recently re-watched the 1989 film *Field of Dreams*. Kevin Costner describes the film as a story about what goes unsaid between fathers and sons. In the film, there is clearly a distance between Costner's character and his father – the separation existed when his father was still living and it hasn't been helped by the years since his death. Costner grieves a version of his father that was set aside for a life in the shipyard to provide for his family. He grieves the time he took for granted, the words said, and especially those left unsaid. Perhaps that's just how it often has been between fathers and sons over the years. There's a separation that exists between them and, if we are being honest, it's not just between fathers and sons, but it's a separation that exists between us and each other. There's an all too familiar gap between members of the human family which at best manifests in awkward avoidance and at worst leads to blood shed, bombs dropped, and fear aerilized. It's a separation that exists between us and the God whom we call father. Could our story also be one about things unsaid between a Father and his children, and the grief and longing of hearts desperate for another chance.

There is this revealing scene in *Field of Dreams* when Costner's character shares with a famous novelist become friend named Terrence Mann, played by James Earl Jones, that in his youthful foolishness he didn't realize what he actually had in his father. As a young man, he didn't know how to apologize to him for the pain he caused as he grew up and pushed against his father in a desire for independence and self-discovery. He didn't know how to go home again to find that rest, that home, that family even though it was the deepest longing of his heart.

In so many ways, that's simply the human story. This separation that exists between us defines everything about us to the point where we can't recognize the humanity of those who look differently or think differently than us. We don't know how to ask for help and to be vulnerable with each other. We don't know how to do justice, or to love mercy, or to walk humbly with our God.

**But it's into that separation, into everything left unsaid, into this gap between us that Christ enters in.** If our world has so often been defined by what separates us, Christ shows up bridging the gap with an unexpected and generous love that connects us one to another. Or here's something to think about: if *Field of Dreams* is about that silence between fathers and sons then in Christ we see a relationship between a Father and Son where nothing is left unsaid. There was nothing separating them. The will of the Father was the will of the Son so that God's love might fill in the gaps of our world.

And then, if we take it a step further, in Christ we find that there is nothing left unsaid between our heavenly Father and all of his children. Christ came to make sure that there was nothing separating us from God. What about death? It won't win! What about Supreme Court Decisions? There's a higher court yet! What about our addiction to violence? It can be cured. What about our longing to go home? Christ will show us the way back to our Father.

**In Christ, God says to us everything we have ever hoped our parents might say to us: You are my child, my beloved, and I love you no matter what.**

St. John the Baptist came to prepare the way for God's arrival in Christ when these separations could end. Fill in the valleys, he said, level the mountains, make the rough places smooth because Christ will reach across the chasm to you. How did John prepare the way? The most simple and profound practice emerged in John's ministry: people went out to the wilderness carrying on their backs everything they had ever done wrong and John invited them to get deep into a river and to wash it all off – a cleansing for the soul. He said, "Here's another chance for you, and remember that someone is coming who will permanently close that gap separating you from God and each other."

And Ian, I think we can boldly claim a similar movement of the Holy Spirit being at play in you for the good Church catholic this weekend. The excitement, the hope, the people reaching out to you from your past, from this church, the worship yesterday for your ordination – it all has to do with this sense that you have been called by God to share in this reconciling ministry of Christ. We see in your story, in your prayer and confession, in your vocation, a person who is willing to dedicate his life to closing that gap that exists between us and God and between us and each other.

If that sounds daunting, it's because it's a HUGE thing that God is doing in our world, but it's not dependent on our success or failure. We just get to share in it. We get to proclaim the Gospel to remind people of the truest story there ever was. We get to baptize people into a Kingdom where they truly belong. We get to share bread and wine that becomes Christ's very self so that the Church can take him in to nourish their souls... so that nothing is separating us from God and we are molded into that very Body of Christ.

Oh man, it's Good News. It's Good News that between God and his only Son nothing has been left unsaid; and between Christ and us, the gap has closed and we are united with Him. And now we get to share in this ministry as the clergy and people of The Episcopal Church of St. John in the Wilderness so that we can be united one to another and our God with his people.

Do you remember how *Field of Dreams* ends? It ends with one last long-since-died ball player left on the field. Costner's character realizes that this isn't one of the famous players who has come to play ball there. He realizes the guy standing there is actually his father – a younger version of him than he ever knew. I reckon there are still things that go unsaid between the two of them but as his father walks away, Costner shouts out, "Hey dad, do you want to play catch?" They begin to throw the ball back and forth. Finally, they can simply be together.