

4 Easter
April 25, 2010
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“Caught on the Mountain”

Many years ago, I belonged to something called: “The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.” It was a government program, which encouraged and challenged teenagers and young adults to become leaders and to learn skills in situations of difficulty. Over two to three years they would learn to sail, swim, race, camp, and climb and learn survival skills. Now there are many branches, and activities to this scheme, you just have to accumulate 60 credits for the bronze award, 100 for the silver and 150 for the gold award.

Our team worked out of the City of Chester, near Wales and our only courses were in sailing, camping, climbing and survival. Camping and survival were difficult because they took place over 48 hours in the mountains of North Wales, often at weekends. We tried to avoid scheduling these courses in winter, when the mountains can be treacherous. But even in the spring, rain wind and fog can make these trips hazardous. We only ever took 12 students at a time, with the rule being that you had to camp on the mountain at least one night, and complete certain scheduled stops or targets.

The Duke of Edinburgh award scheme is all about character. People you think would be good at it can fail miserably, while a little girl, weighing one hundred and 30 lbs can show a roughed determination, inner strength, intellect that speaks of true leadership.

In 1971 on a Sunday afternoon, twelve of us had reached the top of Mt. Snowdon at an altitude of 3,560 feet. By the time we had reached the top, weather had closed in and we were surrounded by fog and rain. We sheltered in a stone sheep pen and debated what to do next. Our great fear was to be caught still descending the mountain, as it got dark. The way we had come up was too long and we were looking for a quick way off the mountain. Directly east was no good, because like the north it was too steep. Jennifer Fort was 5’ 3” with red hair and freckles. At 19, she was in her second year at college. She said she could lead us off the mountain, on a trail that ran to the south. She had studied the map and believed she could keep on the trail with the aid of her compass. She insisted that we all adopt a mountain survival technique by hooking on to a central rope from the leader to tail end Charlie, who brings up the rear. That particular day, that happened to be me, with Jennifer some twenty yards ahead leading.

With anoraks zipped and buttoned tight, hoods covering everything, but our eyes, climbing boots gripping the wet stony ground, waist rope, clipped to the trail rope, we set off through rain and fog, in a crocodile line. In good weather, we would have been chatting and singing, but at 3,500 hundred feet in wind and rain, we were silent and focused on the few feet, and the person we could see in front of us. Jennifer had a whistle and she would give a blast of it, when she wanted to stop and consult her map and compass with the aid of a flashlight from her number 2. Back in the line, we could only wait, silently experiencing how it felt to be almost totally blind and totally dependant on someone else. After many of these stops and some difficult slopes, we arrived at the base of the mountain. It had taken us 6 hours. It took us a further two hours to walk the road back to where we had parked the transit van. It seemed like a long drive home to Chester.

We came off the mountain that day immensely proud of the ten appendices and students we had taken up there. They had shown courage and strength of character even though we had all experienced fear. Over fish and chips, you could hear the relief and exhilaration they felt and the sense of achievement that they had stayed together, not panicked and worked as a team. Sometimes, I wonder what life had in store for them and how the Duke of Edinburgh scheme helped them in their lives?

I tell you all of this because of today's reading. Jesus had conducted a sort of Duke of Edinburgh award scheme for his disciples for three years. He constantly taught them the meaning of faith and belief. He even spoke to them about who could see and who could not see. He tried to give them the tools to continue his work and survive without him.

Now in today's reading, Jesus has gone and the disciples are alone. They only have their faith and Christ's teaching to sustain them. Did they remember? Had they grasped all the lessons and parables he taught them? The stories about sheep and shepherds, had they understood? Did they understand about the Father and what they could ask for things in his name?

In the first lesson from Acts, the story of Tabitha, instantly reminds us of the raising of Jairus' Daughter in the Gospel. Peter now uses the same words as Jesus did when he said: "Little girl I say to you arise."

In the Gospel Jesus speaks of the legacy that he has passed on to his followers: "The words that I do in my father's name testify to me, but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me."

The disciples are commissioned in Jesus' words, to do the work that he had to do. It can be no different for us. The mission of the Episcopal Church is to complete Christ's work here on earth. The mission of this church is to complete Christ's work on earth and more particularly here in Pike County.

This is not an abstract notion, this is a grounded reality. Sometimes so many of you are working in the engine room of this church, that you do not get up to the wheel deck to see where the ship is going.

In the last week, our church mission, visited a hospital, visited and brought Eucharist to four shut-ins. Did one funeral; negotiated money and food donations for the food Pantry, solved ten problems in the Child Care, completed the Parish clean up for the PA Star Program inspection, it negotiated an advertising deal with the ecunet, arranged two events for June and July, conducted six interviews and secured property for the Food Pantry worth \$ 3,000. Oh and Susanne Geissler organized a Parish Cruise to the South Caribbean.

The work of Christ goes on. It goes on, on a daily basis. At times, we may feel like those kids on the mountain. Lost, alone, out of our depth, blind and not knowing what to do next. Being Christ's followers and belonging to his church should tell us that we do have a map, a mission; we do have a compass in Christ and his disciples. We do have leaders to guide us, a Vestry to care for us, a Bishop who loves us, and works tirelessly on our behalf. Let us be positive in doing our part as disciples and members. There is much to do. It cannot be done by a few. Yet, Christ is not going to ask us on Judgment Day, what did we stand around and watch others do? He is going to ask us, what did we do? When did we feed his sheep?

Our stewardship in the Episcopal Church calls us to use our time and talent. As we prepare to enter May, June, and July, I ask all of you to be prepared to support our Vestry and the events they have scheduled for the mission of the church.

May God bless the work he has begun in us?

Amen+

