

Crossing the Deep Cove

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One of the most fantastic things about living in Maine is the abundance of water here. It's truly an embarrassment of riches. From the shores to the mountains we are surrounded by lavish lakes and ponds, seemingly endless streams and rivers, not to mention an entire ocean caressing our coast. Those deep, teeming waters, washing in and out by steady tides, remind us that some things are constant. When life feels especially unsettled, I like to go to one of my favorite coves to watch those steady movements, just to be reminded of that. The human body is made up of about 75-percent water, give or take. Maybe that's why many of us are drawn to Maine's water playgrounds.

Whenever we can, Alan and I grab our kayaks and head out to Gardner Lake by our house, or lately, more often to Orange River where the world slips away as the river carries us merrily, merrily, merrily along, nestled among the trees. On Orange River life does feel like it's but a dream. Last week we were feeling more adventurous though – okay, *I* was feeling more adventurous – so, I dragged Alan and our friend, Gale, along for a paddle at Third Machias Lake. They were both game, more or less. Once there, having only two kayaks, we took turns. Gale and I headed out first. It was a picture-perfect early fall day. Sunny skies, 75 degrees, and gentle breezes. Well, I thought the breezes were gentle. Gale disagreed, politely suggesting we turn back after a particularly frisky wave lapped into her boat. I confess, there were plenty of rambunctious waves ahead. Paddling back around to the cove where the waters were calmer seemed to Gale to be a much more reasonable and enjoyable way to spend the day. She wasn't wrong. Why suffer if we didn't have to, right?

But as we learn in Mark Chapter 8, we aren't promised carefree paddling when it comes to a life of following Christ. And, certainly for Jesus Himself, life was not as we kayakers say, "an easy paddle." Jesus made it clear to Peter that the hard way was the only way. Jesus knew he had to suffer, die, and rise again. It was the only way forward. The only way to gain redemption for us all. But Peter rebuked Jesus. The word rebuke, by definition, means Peter tried to force Jesus to back down – pretty bold, huh? But come on now, Peter was scared. The suffering, for Jesus – for all of them – seemed unnecessary. Not to mention, what would people think of this whole Messiah resurrection thing? Peter got an earful for that one. Jesus yells, telling Peter that he cares more about the concerns of the world than the concerns of God. Well, at that moment, the concerns of the world must have seemed like pretty big, looming waves to Peter. So, Jesus throws some tough love at Peter, admonishing him to get back in line, using what I think are some of Christ's most powerful words.

"For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"

But what does that mean for *us* as we make our way through the rough waters of daily life? How do we stay the course? In Chapter 3, James tells us that one way is to mind our tongues.

James cautions us that, very much like a small rudder on a large ship, what we say can steer us in the wrong direction. It is an evil, James says, that can set the course of one's life *on fire*. Wow, I don't know about you, but I think I'm in peril on nearly a daily basis. It's hard to mind my tongue when everywhere I turn these days I see, hear, and feel hate-filled vitriol oozing from practically every crevice of the world. Where even the sacred commemoration of 9-11 is marred by the shadow of ugly division. Where fear of Covid lurks in every new cough and news report. Where jobs are shaken and falling around us. This stuff is hard. The waves are real. And they are monstrously big at times. How can we ever find our way through such devastating storms?

Thank God, literally, we have the Spirit of Wisdom to guide us. As Solomon tells us, *a breath of the power of God...*

*She is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars.
Compared with the light she is found to be superior,
for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail.*

Pretty mysterious stuff. But every once in a while, God grants us the grace to see Wisdom in action. In July, Alan and I went camping at another new favorite spot, Rocky Lake Preserve in Whiting. Our secluded camping spot on Deep Cove could only be accessed by kayak. This all sounded good in theory – lots of privacy, just me and Alan under a starry sky, reconnecting and decompressing from the stresses of life. What I didn't factor into my grand plan was our dog, Kashmir, a Great Pyrenees who does not fit in, nor take kindly, to kayaks. So, Kashmir stayed home, and Alan paddled back and forth, and back and forth, and back and forth, crossing Deep Cove twice a day, driving the long eight miles over the rough gravel road out of the preserve, and then another eight miles through Route 1 road construction to go tend to Kashmir at home.

By the second night, the romance of camping was gone, and Alan and I were at each other's throats. Those damn tongues again. James did try to warn us. We obviously weren't paying attention. So, Alan paddled away – for the third time that day – after having done an extra supply run earlier in the day. But this time he announced he wouldn't be returning to spend the night. I was kind of okay with that. After all, I had a cozy campfire going, and a box of wine that he'd brought to me from his earlier supply run. But by about nine o'clock that night, sitting at home comfy on the couch watching TV, thinking about me alone in the woods with a dead cell phone, Alan was not so sure he'd made a good decision. So back out he drove, 40-minutes back, driving over construction-pitted Route 1, and then through the pitch-dark woods, over twisting, narrow gravel roads to the Deep Cove parking lot. Sitting by my campfire at my secluded campsite a half mile across the cove, amid the howls of the coyotes, I thought I heard tires on gravel in the far distance. But, no, it couldn't be. After all, it was late, and the cool night air had settled in, wrapping the moonless, warm waters of Deep Cove in a thick flannel blanket of fog. I stood on the rock ledge squinting into the dark void when, suddenly, like a mirage, I saw a tiny, faint flickering light bobbing above the water and heard the rhythmic spittle of water. Gradually, Alan emerged from the mist like a ghost on the water. As Alan got closer, I could see that he had found his way to me across the cove with nothing more than one

of our small outdoor solar lights hooked onto his shirt button. That and, of course, the Spirit of Wisdom guiding him, letting him know it was the right thing to do. *The breath of the power of God* got Alan there safely – and will get all of us across the deep cove of life – no matter how rough or dark the waters.