

June 5, 2020

Dear friends in Christ:



On the lake side of our house, right in front of our bedroom, is an old oak tree that is hollow inside. I have attached a picture of it and if you look closely at the top of the main part of the trunk, you will be able to see a hole which gives entrance to the hollow trunk. And when I say hollow, I mean that it is hollow almost down to the base of the tree. Our first year here, a raccoon was in residence. We never saw any baby raccoons. Last year it was home to a wood duck and her brood. Susan was blessed to see them the day that all the babies left the nest and headed for the lake.

This year a merganser duck took up residence in the old oak tree. Susan, who is outside working on gardens while I am inside working on services, saw her make her way into the hollow oak on numerous occasions. She has also seen her come out and fly straight to the lake. On Saturday May 30th, we were outside working at watering new grass and some gardens on the driveway side of the house. Susan went to water some new plants she had put in on the

lake side. She noticed Momma Merganser standing at the foot of the tree. She suddenly realized that this was “graduation day” and that the ducklings would be leaving the nest. She came and got me and I grabbed our phones so we could take pictures.

What an incredible sight. The ducklings crawled to the edge of the hole, which is 12 feet above the ground and suddenly would launch off into space. They didn't fly. It was more like a free fall. The ground at the base of the tree is hard and they would land with a wallop. At this point Momma Merganser was nowhere to be seen. She was waiting for them down at the lake. It surprised us that the ducklings seemed no worse for wear after their plunge. (Click on the following link to watch them.

<https://youtu.be/heThHzuMYB8>). They would pick themselves up, give a little shake and head off across the grass towards the lake. Upon reaching the lake, they had to jump off a 5 foot cliff to join their mother in the water.

(<https://youtu.be/PUPkRfIAC3o>) These videos are not in sequence. My first video didn't turn out so well. Our best guess was that 11 ducklings exited the nest and made it to the lake. We didn't see them when they finally swam away together. We figured it was time we gave them their privacy.



I have thought a lot about that those ducklings and that it was by the grace of God that we got to see them “graduate”. What strikes me is that up until that Saturday morning all they had ever known was the inside of that tree trunk. Way down in that hollow trunk, you don’t get a view of the outside world. So Saturday morning they took their first plunge out of that hole into thin air. I wouldn’t call it flying. They took their first walk through grass to the lake. Do you remember what it is like watching a baby put their hand off a blanket and into grass for the first time? For the first time, they jumped off a little cliff and landed in the water and began to swim. And not until they got to the lake could they see their mother. How do they know how to do all these things when they have never done them before? We call it “instinct”. It is something that God has built into them.

Right now, in the middle of this pandemic, we are experiencing some things that most of us have never experienced before. How do we navigate these new experiences when we have no training and are not sure how to respond? We don’t know “instinctively” what to do. However, as Christians, God has put something inside of each one of us to guide us when we don’t know the path forward. It is called the Holy Spirit. When Jesus told his disciples that he was going back to the Father, he left them with this promise. **16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.** We need to be willing to allow the Holy Spirit to guide us in uncertain times.



Even in the midst of this pandemic, God will not abandon us. He has a plan and purpose for each one of us. **11 For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you,” declares the LORD.** (Jeremiah 29). The same God who placed an instinctive knowledge in those ducklings of jumping, walking and swimming has placed within each one of

his born anew children His Holy Spirit. We can never leave home without him because he has taken up permanent residence. All we need to do is be prepared to follow his leading. He will never lead us outside God’s will for our lives. In Deuteronomy 29 we read: **3 I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! 4 He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just.**

Your servant in Christ,
Rev. Stephen Dunkin
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