

*“Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother’s eye.”* St. Luke 6. 42.

As some of you may know, I just spent six days at Camp Brookwood, up in Florenceville-Bristol as the camp’s chaplain. Camp Brookwood is a small camp that was originally founded as an Anglican Camp for the deanery and parish in that area, but is now a Diocesan camp. Compared to Camp Medley that has more than 150 beds, Brookwood is much much smaller, only able to accommodate about 26 campers. There is even a whole Church at Brookwood that was moved there from nearby Aroostook sometime in the camp’s 50-years of history. As the chaplain, I thought having a whole church to myself was great, and what opportunity it was to show off the Anglican Church!

Well, this week was “superhero” theme week for ages 7 and 8. It was a lot of fun, truly. But, wow, was it a daunting task for a chaplain who’s been ordained less than a month and with no experience at all in children’s ministry. For, you see, here was the problem I had. Though this was a “Christian Camp” run by the Anglican Church, on the very first day – last Sunday night – when I asked the kids who was in a church for the first time, almost all of them raised their hands. The reason I asked this question was more for my benefit than anything else: I wanted to know who I was working with. I assumed that probably half of them would be new to the idea of Church, but only two of my twelve campers had ever stepped foot inside a church before in the last 7 years. Not only had they never been in a church, but they hadn’t heard of Jesus before, and only knew about God by learning to say “oh my God!”.

In that moment my priorities changed. I very quickly realized that I was in a room with kids who may never again darken the door of a church after this week, so I had some work to do. I suddenly had to start from ZERO and felt the need to plant the seeds of faith in these kids in a way I’ve never had to before. And I’ve never even really thought about this before, to be honest. I’ve always been in a privileged enough position to be talking to rooms mostly full of people who knew what I was talking about, and probably even knew more about the Christian faith than I did. But here I was, a young deacon in a black shirt and collar in a room to talk about Jesus to kids who had never even heard his name before.

Now, you may be sitting here thinking to yourself, “that’s great Nicholas, I’m glad you had a great time at Camp Brookwood, but why are you telling us this?” And that’s totally fair. But, I’ll tell you why: this week at Camp Brookwood made me feel exactly like some of the people in our Gospel for today.

This reading from the Gospel of Luke is taken from the part of Luke’s Gospel called the “sermon on the plain.” I assume you’ve likely heard about the Sermon on the Mount before? Well, this is almost the same thing but is a parallel reading, where the sermon on the mount is from the Gospel of Matthew, this is Luke’s version. Instead of on the side of a mountain, Jesus has a crowd of people listening to him in a field.

The part that we have today comes right after a section where Jesus is telling the people gathered to hear him to love the people around them, even if those people are enemies. “Be merciful,” he says, “just as your Father is merciful” (6:36). This section also has the famous line, “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (6:31). So, with that in mind, Jesus says don’t judge or condemn, or else you will be judged and condemned, but forgive and others will forgive you (6:37).

Jesus then says, “Can a blind person lead a blind person, or will both not fall into a pit?” (6:40). Well, I can tell you, that’s how I felt this week. I felt like an utterly blind person

leading a whole group of other blind people when it came to teaching about God and Jesus. How was I ever supposed to teach a group of kids who had never heard of any of these things about Jesus? How could I share the Gospel with them. In three years of Seminary, this isn't something we ever had to do: explain it all from scratch. This was new and foreign – I felt truly like a blind man leading more blind students.

I could have been angry and just given up all hope. I could have thought that it was pointless, because these kids will never come back to a church after they leave here. I was thinking how sad it is that parents don't bring their kids to church anymore, and if they had, how much better off I'd be. I was passing the buck, blaming others instead of trying to work through what was before me. I was seeing the speck in my neighbour's eye but ignoring the log in my own (6:41). If I, as a minister of the Church, wasn't willing to try and work through this challenge, then who would? That was the log in my own eye: by passing the buck, I was neglecting the responsibility that had been given to me to spread the Good News of Jesus to this group of children. I had to stop and think, then, if I was having this kind of a mental block, there must be so many others who face this same issue.

So, when it comes to sharing and proclaiming the Gospel with our neighbours, how many of us are faced with these kind of blocks? Rather than acknowledging the log in our own eyes, we point out the speck in somebody else's. We are so quick to judge, but not nearly as quick to forgive or to acknowledge our own responsibility in a situation.

If you were faced with the same situation of needing to teach a bunch of kids about the Gospel, what would you do? By the Grace of God, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I think I made a difference. But I could have easily thrown my hands up in despair and done nothing. We have been given the task from Jesus to proclaim the Good News in our lives. To tell others about His saving Grace and Love. It's not an easy task, and there are often barriers put up in front of us – sometimes even ones that we make for ourselves. It's challenging but it's necessary work. Even though I had a captive audience, I almost didn't try to take the opportunity. Ultimately, I'm glad that I did but it could have easily been so much different.

As we go out from this place and into our lives, we have to try and pay attention to all the opportunities that the Spirit presents us with. Maybe there's somebody who wants to hear comfortable words of Jesus. Maybe somebody else wants to know what Christians think about death. Maybe another person simply wants to feel a loving embrace to break a cycle of loneliness. Or, maybe somebody comes to the door for a glass of water for their dog. Regardless of the opening, when talking about your faith or the blessings in your life, don't be afraid to explain how you know it, even if every detail isn't in order.

The kids I was working with this week weren't worried about the details. We were talking about superheroes this week, and I didn't have time to say everything in order or give them all the details. That didn't matter to them. This was the first time they ever heard the Gospel: that Jesus performed miracles, that Jesus walked on water, that Jesus died and rose from the dead, and that Jesus loves them no matter what. By the end of the week, they thought that Jesus was one of the greatest superheroes even though I didn't tell them everything in order. This never would have happened if I had not first paid attention to the beam in my own eye, and asked for God's guidance to get out of His way. And so I urge you to trust Him when it comes to talking about your faith. We cannot do anything without God's help, and the first step is often acknowledging how we get in our own way.

I tend to agree with the kids, Jesus is *the* greatest superhero, and we should be talking more about him.