

*"Crossing the Bigelow Lawn"*

John 14:1- 12

This week I was scanning the Daily Sun and came across an article about the Sanbornton Congregational Church's "Cairns for Peace" project. In the article Rev. Ruth Martz quotes Karen Horst Cobb who believes that for many people the dove and olive branch, traditional symbols of peace, have lost their power in our popular culture. And proposes that we consider those simple yet, oh so important piles of rocks known as cairns as way markers on the way to peace.

I leaned back in my office chair and my thoughts wandered back a few years to a day hiking. I had just crested Boott Spur, a peak southeast of the summit of Mt. Washington. While Boott Spur rises to an elevation of 5500 feet, its summit is less than 200 feet above the connecting ridge, so it does not count as a 4000 footer. To the north, a side wall of Tuckerman's Ravine drops precipitously over 1500 feet to Hermit Lake. Below I could see the roof tops of the shelters. To the southwest was the more gradual decline into another glacial cirque known as Oakes Gulf and the Dry River Wilderness Area some 2000 feet below me.

Ahead of me the Davis Path stretched out across a relatively level area that lies well above the tree line known as the Bigelow Lawn. It named after a prominent botanist who did extensive studies in the White Mountains. Being completely above the tree line it is exposed all the elements the White Mountains can fling at unwary hikers.

This day I could see the signpost making the junction of the Davis Path and the Bigelow Lawn Cut-off trail that ascends directly up the south slope of Washington some half a mile or more away. And across the broad ridge I could see friendly

piles of stones or cairns looking like a children's book connect-the-dots puzzle linking points along the Davis Path together.

In the midst of this rather pleasant meandering of my mind I remembered that I had a stewardship sermon to prepare and so my thoughts turned to the task at hand . . . and yet . . . it was such a beautiful day to be in the mountains.

I still was picturing that line of cairns across Bigelow Lawn when I reread the passage our stewardship theme "The Way" is taken from, more specifically Jesus as the Way.

I read from a version of the scriptures known as "The Voice" (not to be confused with a television talent program by the same name!)

I am the *path*, the truth, and the *energy of* life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you know Me, you know the Father. Rest assured now; you know Him and have seen Him. – The Voice

My mind was pulled back to that view from Boott Spur across Bigelow lawn. On clear days you can see the cairns stretching out in front of you marking the location of the trail, often several of them at a time. On days like this the trail is easy to follow; one can see the footpath clearly. And the stone cairns serve as little more than distance markers. As in, I'm passing the fourth cairn of the seven I could see at the last trail junction.

But let the wind pick up, the clouds lower, the biting rain whip against your face and you may, at best, see only the next stone cairn and that barely. Yet, that is enough. You trust that sight, that little glimpse, that vision and you make your way from one way-marker to the next.

What's this have to do with stewardship?

It seems to me that right now in the life of the Church and our congregation being no exception, as we try to make sense of cultural shifts, a fog of uncertainty may have settled in around us. Whereas a couple of decades ago the way ahead seemed fairly clear. We just needed to keep on moving the way we had been going, perhaps some tweaking or updating a program or two but the path was there, and all seemed well enough.

But today the way for the church may not be clear to us, the landscape is changing around us, the wind has shifted direction. It is no longer blowing at our backs helping us along but now a head wind and the church is straining against it.

The way may not be clear. And let me be honest, I cannot see the way clearly. Any pastor or church leader who tells you they can and has a 3-point plan for church success is most likely trying to sell you a set of his or her DVDs!

No, I cannot see clearly the way ahead for the church, but just as in hiking, the next cairn is out there. Perhaps it is a bit obscured by the swirling clouds of cultural change, but I believe with every mustard seed of my faith, that the way is there for the church. And that WAY is the way of Jesus and if we look (pray) long enough and are attentive enough we will be able to recognize, we'll catch a glimpse, we will "see" enough to take the next step *forward* and not retreat in fear or immobilized by indecision. You know the old expression: You can sit on the fence for a time but after a while it gets rather uncomfortable and you got to get off one direction or another.

Stewardship is our way of saying we trust (have faith) in the way of Jesus as it is expressed through this congregation's gifts, ministries, outreach programs, life-giving works of compassion and caring by each and every one of you and not just the pastors!

Stewardship, the giving of our time, talents and financial resources is our way of saying, "I'm jumping off the fence on the side of the way of Jesus." That I trust that he has shown us the way through his lifestyle of teaching, healing, and compassion to those we have labeled as "them" the outsider, the outcast, the persons on the margins of society. We can see the way in his life, death and resurrection, and that he will continue to reveal to us the way as we step out in faith time and time again.

You know if we could see the way clearly then taking that step wouldn't require a whole lot of faith. It is when we cannot see clearly or know beyond a doubt the way and we still step out in the direction of Jesus this in when we are being the people of faith Jesus calls us to be.

So, as you open that envelop from the Stewardship Committee this week and hold that pledge card in your hand you will have a faith decision to make. Will you step in the direction of *the way of Jesus* as expressed through this congregation?

The Bigelow Lawn of this church's future stretches out before us and I believe the clouds are lifting. And just perhaps we can see the next cairn, way-marker in front of us.