

After our interviews for ministry jobs in Canada, after the contracts were signed, after we knew we were leaving the US, Jim and I embarked on what we affectionately called the Southern farewell tour. Since we had no home, we tried to visit the people we loved – family and friends all over the states – imposing on them once again. As we traveled we chose the highway to take by its access to interesting places that would lead us to our next destination. So we went to the Largest McDonald’s – which is in Oklahoma, not Texas. We went to the largest Christmas Store in the world in Michigan. We went to the “Corn Palace” – a huge building in Iowa made entirely of corn. We had ice cream in the city where the most ice cream is made in the world. And we went to the *Field of Dreams*.

Yes, it is a real place in Iowa. We sat in the stands. We bought five baseballs and scuffed them up a bit playing catch – throwing them back and forth from the pitcher’s mound to home plate. We later gave those balls to our five children. We visited the two souvenir shops that both claim to be the “official” *Field of Dreams* outlet. You see, the property where the movie was filmed was on two farms and neither of the owners was willing to sell to the other or even work collegially with the neighbor. The movie site consists of 193 acres with one baseball diamond (281 feet (86 meters) to left field, 314 feet (96 meters) to center, and 262 (80 meters) to right field the border of which is a corn field with temporary bleachers that hold 89 people.), a two bedroom farmhouse and, of course, the cornfields. Since the movie was made in 1989, the *Field of Dreams* has attracted about 2500 fans a year. And all these years there have been two signs, two entrances, and two souvenir shops. Every summer another neighboring farmer put together a team of “Ghost Players” who would play the locals one Sunday a month each summer. And there have been celebrity games to raise money for charities. Five years ago, the owner of the farm that was mostly left field sold to the other farmer.

The *Field of Dreams* was sold again last week for \$3.4 million. Third baseman Wade Boggs who played for the Red Socks, the Yankees, and the Devil Rays and James Earl

Jones, one of the actors in the movie, along with an investment group called Go the Distance plan to turn the property into a 24-field baseball and softball complex called All-Star Ballpark Heaven.

You might ask what this has to do with the Scripture readings for today. Well, we have a very short Epiphany this year. Easter can fall anytime between March 22<sup>nd</sup> and April 25<sup>th</sup>. This year Easter Day is March 31<sup>st</sup>, not the earliest it can fall, but it is certainly very early. Lent is always 40 days, plus Sundays, but Easter is calculated as the first Sunday following the first full moon that falls on or after the vernal equinox. Epiphany Day fell on a Sunday this year. Today, the Baptism of the Lord, is the second Sunday in Epiphany. And there are only four more Sundays in Epiphany. That is not a lot of time for a church season. So Lent is almost upon us. And Easter Day and the great 50 days of Easter are just around the corner. The gospels for Epiphany this year come from Matthew, Luke, and John. So where is the theme of this Epiphany?

I believe that Epiphany is about call. So call and callings will be my theme for this season, however, short it is this year.

In the movie *Field of Dreams* an Iowa farmer hears a mysterious voice borne on the wind blowing through his corn field: “If you build it, he will come!” The voice becomes more insistent, until he gives in and builds a baseball diamond, complete with lights for night games and bleachers for spectators. A host of long-dead ball players come out of the night fog of the corn to play on the ball field, one asking, “Is this heaven?” To which, the farmer responds, “It's Iowa.” But the real “He” who was to come is the farmer's long estranged and long dead father. In a simple game of “catch” on the field they have a chance to talk, see life from the other's point of view, and experience forgiveness and a restored relationship.<sup>1</sup> Ray – the character played by Kevin Costner – was inspired by the 60's writer and activist Terrance Mann who also heard the voice, but his message was “Go the Distance.”

In a two minute monologue James Earl Jone's character in his warm and gentle voice of reason convinced Ray not to sell the farm. He captured everything that we baseball fans hold dear about the game.<sup>2</sup> When James Earl Jones spoke you can almost smell the

grass and taste the popcorn; you could almost feel and hear the ball hit the leather of your glove; you could almost see the brilliant blue sky of summer.

After his dip in the waters – the magical waters – of the Jordon River, Jesus’s call was revealed, and clearly his call came directly from God. And he went about the work he was called to do.

What if we could put together a two-minute speech about what the church means to us? Could we encapsulate our wonderful memories of life in the church, life here at St. Andrew’s, in the Anglican Church of Canada, in the Anglican communion, in the Christian world? Could we describe what has formed us since our baptisms into the psyche of Christian life and work? What brings back those memories for us? Consider using all our senses.

With our eyes we see the cross that guides us on the wall behind the altar, we see the hangings in vivid colors, throughout the church year in white and red, and green, and purple. We see pure white linens on the altar set aside for holy use.

We hear with our ears the music of the church, the oh-so-familiar prayers we hear and speak every Sunday.

We taste the symbolic body and blood of Christ in consecrated bread and wine during communion. This holy food feeds us to go into the world to do the work we are called to do, feeding others with Jesus who after communion renewal dwells in us.

We recall the scent of Chrism oil with which we were sealed in baptism and marked as Christ’s own – forever. We smell the 8<sup>th</sup> sacrament – coffee in the Parish Hall downstairs. This time of fellowship with the smell of coffee wafting in the air during coffee hour after services can be as formative to some of us Christians as the taste of the bread and wine.

And we feel our fellow Christians hands in ours as we pass the peace – that peace that passes all understanding. We feel it when we reach out to touch others in their need, whether it be in the hospital, in their homes or at the Drop Inn Centre.

But so much of what we might want to describe with all our five senses cannot be felt, or smelled, or tasted, or seen, or heard, because the mystery of faith is just that a mystery.

But I am convinced that we all could – in two minutes – describe to a seeker what we experience here. New Christians are made by invitation. And I believe that is our calling, my friends, to invite others to come and experience what brought us and keeps us in communion with one another. We cannot simply “build it and expect people to come.” We have to be pro-active. May we embrace our baptismal vow to bring all people to know and love and serve God.

Lord, may it be so. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark D. Johns, Instructor of Communication/Linguistics, Luther College, Decorah, IO.

<sup>2</sup> People will come, Ray. They'll come to Iowa for reasons they can't even fathom. They'll turn up your driveway, not knowing for sure why they're doing it, and arrive at your door, innocent as children, longing for the past. 'Of course we won't mind if you look around,' you'll say. 'It's only twenty dollars per person.' And they'll pass over the money without even looking at it. For it is money they have, and peace they lack.

They'll walk out to the bleachers and sit in shirtsleeves in the perfect evening, or they'll find they have reserved seats somewhere in the grandstand or along one of the baselines -- wherever they sat when they were children and cheered their heroes. They'll watch the game, and it will be as if they'd dipped themselves in magic waters. The memories will be so thick they'll have to brush them away from their faces.

The one constant through all the years, Ray, has been baseball. America has rolled by like an`army of steamrollers. It's been erased like a blackboard, rebuilt, and erased again. But baseball has marked the time. This field, this ° game... it's a piece of our past. It reminds us of all that once was good. And that could be again. People will come. People will most definitely come.