

There was a survey of Anglican priests in Britain done recently. It asked a wide range of questions about justice issues, innocuous things like pay, and probing questions about their faith in God. I thought it was fascinating, especially since they broke it down into age ranges: 18-24, 25-34, 35-44—all the way up to 65 and over.

My attention was caught by the questions about faith. On one side of the spectrum was a belief in a personal God. On the other side it said, “no one can know what God is like.” One side was more of a certainty, the other was *less certain*--a mystery. But what really caught my attention was that the younger the clergy, the more certain their beliefs. The older the clergy—especially among the *oldest*—there was a much higher percentage of uncertainty and mystery: “No one can know what God is like.”

I noticed the same thing while I was in seminary. The young seminarians – of which I was one-- were usually the most rigid—absolutely certain about everything. The oldest were the most open to perhaps NOT knowing everything—to perhaps realizing after a longer lifetime—how little they actually knew for certain. It was like they had discovered that God is bigger, more complicated and more vastly loving that they could ever have thought. The oldest had become humble—at last realizing the limits to defining God.

No one can know with complete certainty what God is like. We know God is love, and strives to teach us about love—but we are still learning about love: it’s joys, it’s costs. It’s depths. We will still be learning to the end of our days.

Nobody likes to think that they still have a lot to learn.

About 10 years ago, several people told me that I had good energy, and they thought that was going to be the defining thing I would bring to a parish.

As we sometimes do, I took that to heart – perhaps a little too zealously-- at my first parish. Energy is good—I said to myself—I need to be full of energy, and vigorously put forth my ideas.

So --I might have come on like gangbusters--in for a penny, in for a pound, right? Well, as you can imagine- there were times when this was perhaps not the best approach. Someone, someone I trusted—*gently* told me that I sometimes reminded him of a “bulldozer”--mowing down everyone in my path.

Ouch.

Those people who had perceived that energy was my biggest gift --might have not realized that our greatest gifts can be our greatest obstacles, and our weaknesses can be our greatest opportunities. That person may not have been seeing the whole truth.

Slowly, the Spirit—through my beloved mentor—taught me that it's better not to mow people down with my enthusiasm. I should build consensus, listen to all perspectives, and realize that when you have access to more ideas—plans become more rich, multi-faceted and exciting. People invest in what they help to build.

It would be tempting to think that after being ordained for nearly 7 years – I have it all down. It would be tempting—but not smart. There is always more to learn. More truth to discover. We discover the humility of what we don't know, and the pain of what we don't understand. And that is our greatest opportunity.

*Jesus said: "I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."*

The word “bear” in Greek is *bastazo* (*bas-tad'-zo*)—and it usually means “to take up, to carry”. Something that would be too heavy to lift would be “unbearable”. Too difficult to carry. Too heavy to be moved.

Are there concepts in our lives we currently find “unbearable?” Too hard to carry? Are there things we used to be certain of- that we're having to unlearn? Are we being offered opportunities to put down the load of our certainties—to embrace new lessons? Jesus says “*When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all Truth.*” This seems to imply-- not only that we don't have it all yet-- but that we can only receive more as we're able to hear it, carry it --to bear it.

How many times have we not fully understood something until we have gone through it ourselves?

Some things we have to live through—or have someone close to us live through-- to understand. Some things we just don't understand- yet. At those times I'm trying very hard to listen more than advise. Because the Holy Spirit is more than willing to teach -- though insight and ***through others.***

Jesus says, "*More will be revealed.*"

I have encountered people that believe that the revealed word of God ended when the scriptures took their final form. Some of these people believe that nothing more can be added to the words of the Bible. Or subtracted. Or revealed.

This puzzles me. Jesus *told* us more would be revealed. Just like he said:

*"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; "* ----why would he say that-- if that wasn't true?

Either the Spirit is still leading us into all Truth or it is not.

I know-- I know-- REALLY, I know--**nobody** likes to think that they still have much to learn. It makes us give up our illusion of control. Makes us realize that our ideas about God—are still not fully known. We can be sure about the love—but more **will be revealed- even about the depths of love God expects..**

Today we celebrate the birth of the church – and the new ways the church is being born in this age. Our strengths are sometimes our biggest obstacles, and our weaknesses our greatest opportunity.

But the Spirit will lead us. Ready or not-- here it comes. Amen.