
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

February 15, 2015

Pelicans

“When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us.”
Romans 5:6 (Common English Bible)

Florida has two pelicans, the Brown Pelican who is present year round and the White Pelican who is a “snowbird” and only arrives in the winter. An exciting bird to watch, the pelican has a very large bill with a rather large pouch used to gather food. Most days they can be seen from the beaches of South Florida diving from great heights, crashing into the water and emerging seconds later with a satisfying meal of fish. I have sat on Delray Beach and counted as many as fourteen flying together along the shoreline overhead. For me, watching pelicans in flight is a most satisfying experience!

The early Christian Church often used images of the pelican as a symbol of caring and self-sacrifice. This was because of a misunderstood practice of pelicans as they cared for their young. While feeding her babies a mother pelican often presses her bill onto her chest in order to fully empty the pouch. The early church thought that the mother was wounding herself - providing her own blood from her chest - when no other food was available. The Dalmation pelican has a blood-red pouch in early breeding season and this may have contributed to this misperception. As a result, the pelican came to symbolize the death of Jesus that we might have forgiveness and life.

Here in this sentence from Romans, Paul speaks to God’s character and achievement, in particular, Jesus sacrificing himself - accepting wounds on his own body - for a people who were utterly helpless because of their sins. Christ’s own suffering and death on a cross shows God’s gracious, surprising love for us. The careful reader will notice that God’s love is not conditional. God doesn’t ask anything in return before dying for us. What is abundantly clear is that it was at that point *“we were utterly helpless”* that God did what was necessary for us. For anyone who inquires of the character of God, that is what God is like. God loves us first.

The self-wounding pelican for her young is a legend. More careful observation has taught us much about pelicans. Yet, this legend provides hope, encouragement and strength for me. Each time I am on the beach enjoying a beautiful day I look for pelicans in flight overhead. When I see one - or many - I am reminded of the legend. And that legend is all I need to hear the words again in my heart, *“Christ came at just the right time”* for me.

Prayer: *May every flight of a pelican today remind me of your unconditional love. In the certain name of your son, my savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.*

Doug Hood