

May 2007

I went fishing today, by myself.

Earlier this summer Luke and I discovered a great little stream called Coal Creek. It runs hard and fast down out of the Flat Tops, broken by old beaver dams and the occasional deep pool. Now and then it flattens out into lovely runs. We had a wonderful time catching wild rainbows and brook trout, much larger than I expected to see in that little stream. But we only had time to fish about a mile of it. I've been wanting to get back ever since and explore more of what this little treasure has to offer. I noticed on a map that the creek meanders far from the road before it spills into the Bear River, and there's nothing that catches a fisherman's imagination like the possibility of untouched waters. I might be the first guy to fish that section in years.

My plan was to hike up the Bear to the confluence, and begin my explorations from there. The canyon of the Bear caught me by surprise. It's beautiful down in there. The river flows through a forest of evergreens, some of them leaning way out over the water, so that the sunlight comes through here and there splashing the river with light and then shade and then light. The river separates now and then into braids and then re-joins itself. Now, it wasn't my plan to fish the Bear – I was after the untouched waters of the creek. But when I reached the bottom of the canyon and started upriver, I was immediately met with a handsome run of clear green water just begging for a dry fly. It was too inviting. I caught a lovely thirteen inch rainbow on my first cast, and made a change of plans. I would fish the Bear as I hiked – not too seriously, because the creek was my destination – but enough to sample the most alluring runs.

The Bear proved to be the treat of the day. By the time I reached the creek, I'd caught a half dozen fish without much effort. And now that I'd reached my goal, it became obvious that the creek was unfishable. It plunges off a geologic shelf for a mile or so, cascading down with far too much speed to make for good fishing. I was disappointed. The creek was the point; the river had only been tossed in as a bonus. Or so I thought.

Then I remembered something God has been teaching me this summer – it's not what he isn't giving, but what he *is* giving. We can get so locked onto what we don't have, what we think we want or need, that we miss the gifts God is giving. Really, though the river had proved to be everything I hoped the creek would be – solitude, beauty, wild fish on a dry fly – I sulked half way back to the car because I didn't get my creek.

Back in June I was obsessed with finding elk antlers on our property. I know there are some magnificent bulls that migrate through in the spring – when the elk shed their antlers – and being on private property I knew my chances were pretty good of finding a trophy lying in the dense timber or along a fence line. I set out one afternoon to hunt sheds with the prayer, *Father, I know you love me. Would you help me find a shed?* As I wandered up the bluff behind the cabin, I tried to listen to God for any guidance he might give. And it did feel as though at several junctures of game trails I was prompted to go right more than left, or push higher up through the timber.

I was optimistic. As I crested the ridge I had to push through a stand of young firs, and there ahead of me was a huge red tail hawk sitting on the top of a small fir, its back to me, swaying in the wind. He didn't know I was there, so I got to watch him for fifteen minutes or so. Every once in awhile a gust of wind would sweep up the bluff and the hawk would spread his wings to maintain balance. Or was it to show me his beautiful brown and white pinions? Then suddenly he was in the air, and off across the valley. A lovely gift. I knew it was a gift. And I had to say to myself, *It's not what God is not giving, but what he is giving.* No shed. But a hawk. He knows I love hawks. I collect their feathers. I will stop whatever I'm doing to watch them. This was today's gift. He *did* lead me, just not to what I expected.

Later, in July, the family and I were canoeing the Snake River in Teton National Park. It was evening, and I was guiding our family and some dear friends down a part of the river most folks don't get to see, and rarely canoe at dusk. I knew we would be alone, at the prime time for wildlife to come down for a drink. Hopes were high of seeing bull moose, and elk, and who knows what else. We'd seen bear in here before, too. The evening could not have been more beautiful. As we glided along the banks, peering into the wild growth on either side, time slipped away. It could have been the 1800's. It could have been the 1600's. We were utterly alone on the silent river, at twilight, and I knew we were in for a treat.

We passed the den of some river otters we'd seen last year. Nobody home. We passed the island that moose are always hanging out on. Nope. Just a beaver or two. Frustrated, I made the group paddle an extra mile through a back channel where I *knew* the moose had to be. But no. The sun passed behind the Tetons, and everyone was enjoying a spectacular sunset in the clouds above. But I missed it entirely, because I was so disappointed we didn't see wildlife. I was totally focused on what God was *not* giving, and missed what he *was* giving. Only later, looking at the photos Blaine took, did I see all that I missed. It was truly stunning. Peaches and pinks and red above the black skyline of the mountains, all reflected in the river. I missed it. I nearly missed the Bear River today.

*Father, forgive me. Forgive my demanding posture that life has to come to me on my terms. O Lord – how many gifts have I missed? Forgive me. It's ugly and narrow. I pray for a more gracious posture, to be so open and grateful for what you are giving at any time. I pray to be your son.*

May you see all that God is giving you this month.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'John' written in a cursive, flowing style.

John