

**Retreat Story – Fresh Eyes Seeing – Fresh ‘I’s Being  
Lake Yale Sunday morning worship  
May 1, 2011**

**Hebrews 11: Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen.**

Once upon a time the water in this lake was considered to be magic, or to use another word, holy. But for its magic to work, you have to come to these waters three years in a row and ask for its magic to come to you. Then on the fourth time you come here the secret of the water is revealed to you. Most people give up after the second or third time. Or sometime around their second or third trip to these waters they think they’re too smart or too old to ask for the magic of the water, so they never find it.

So remember, you have to come three times for the magic and then come back a fourth time and ask to get the secret of the magic.

Two years ago on this retreat I told you about how my father Johnny Reimer, his brother Alvin, and sister Olga found a whale that had washed in from the Gulf of Mexico during a huge hurricane and had been carried up the Mississippi River to the Arkansas River, to the Kansas River finally to be deposited in the Blazefork, a river that ran through the farm in Buhler, Kansas where my dad grew up.

I told you the story about how Johnny, Alvin, and Olga turned that whale into a whale house boat just for their adventures. They hid it in a cave in the Blazefork and nobody, not their parents and not their friends, knew it was there.

When I was a little boy my father told me all the stories of the whale house he could remember. I then told them to my sons, Matt and Chris, and now I tell the stories to my grandchildren.

So I want to tell you a story that never made sense to me until I grew up, came to Florida, and then started coming to Lake Yale for retreats. You see, in the summer when the Kansas wheat harvest was over, their parents went and helped other farmers with their harvest. During that time, Johnny, Alvin, and Olga would often take that whale house back out into the Gulf again and sail around Florida.

Most interesting to me of their Florida journeys was the time they took that whale house up the St. John’s River to the Ocklawaha River, and sailed down the chain of lakes from Lake Griffin, to Lake Harris, to Lake Eustis to right here, Lake Yale.

The first year they came to this beautiful lake they may well have anchored their whale house at this beach. They loved it here, but on their second night, Johnny tripped over a root and a low branch hit him in the stomach. It hurt but he didn’t think too much of it. But the next morning he couldn’t eat. He could hardly move, and he had a fever. Alvin and Olga didn’t know what to do. There were still a few Indians living near here. The white people called them Seminoles, but originally they were the Miccosukee, and

then Creeks. They had a healer named Micco who knew a lot about the plants around here that could be used as medicine.

Micco looked at Johnny and knew he was very, very sick. Something had broken inside him. In fact Micco had traded medicines and talked enough with the doctors in town to believe that what those doctors called the appendix had broken. The healer made a potion from the plants and gave it to Johnny to drink. He put a small reed in Johnny's side to drain the poison inside. It helped a little, but Johnny was still very sick, and they all thought he might well die.

The last thing Micco did was take a bowl of water from the lake, hold it up under the full moon, say a blessing over it and for the next two days and nights simply bathe Johnny's face, neck, chest and stomach with this water.

On the third day, Johnny began to get better.

This was so amazing that Alvin and Olga wanted to know what Micco had done. Micco said there was some poison in Johnny's body and that his potions and medicine helped some. But more than anything else, he thought the healing water of Lake Yale finally saved Johnny.

This water would cure certain illness, and nobody knew why. But more importantly, Micco said, this water could renew the life of someone whose heart had shriveled up, whose hopes would no longer flow. The water gave fresh eyes to see tomorrow to people who could not see past the troubles of today. This was called the water of fresh eyes seeing.

Jonny, Alvin, and Olga looked at each other with the same thought. They knew right away who else needed that water, their father Abram and their mother Katie.

Abram had had a hard life. He had come to Kansas from Russia as a young man during the time of the Kansas dust bowl when no rain fell for years. Abram would like to have been a musician or a school teacher, but there was no time or money for this. He had to become a farmer, but he was not a good farmer. He married Katie who had brought him happiness for a while and he to her, but in the toil of the farm the music had gone out of his life, and with it went both the sparkle in his eyes and in those of his wife Katie.

Their father Abram's heart had shriveled, and their mother Katie's heart seems to have done the same. No matter what they tried to do, Johnny, Alvin, and Olga could not make their parents see tomorrow with hope, nor make them smile.

Johnny, Alvin, and Olga decided they would take some of this magic, healing water back with them. But Micco, the medicine man told them to wait. The water only became healing water after the traveler had visited it three times. On the fourth time, the magic, healing power would rise for the traveler and for those to whom he gave it.

The problem was that Lake Yale was a long way from Kansas, especially by whale house. But Johnny, Dora, and Alvin knew they would have to come back here three more summers to bring this water back to their father and mother. And they promised to do it.

They sailed the whale house back to Kansas. Their parents were so tired and shriveled that they didn't notice their children had been gone. Their parents' eyes were dim and saw very little.

The next summer, Johnny, Alvin, and Olga were growing up. Olga, the oldest, had a job at the Buhler Café, and she couldn't leave for a whole trip to Florida, so Johnny and Alvin made the trip without her. They got to Lake Yale. They found Micco again. They swam in the blessed water and returned to Kansas.

The next summer Johnny and Alvin returned. Micco tended to them again, blessing the water one more time. But it would take one more year for the water to be magic.

The next year the whale house was getting older and so were Johnny, Alvin, and Olga. That winter a great storm swept the whale house down the Blazefork and broke it into pieces.

Alvin went off to college. Olga got married. But Johnny did not forget their promise. That fourth summer Johnny worked for a number of farmers during harvest and saved enough money to buy a 1932 Ford Coupe which he drove alone to Lake Yale in Florida. By that time the Indians were gone, so Johnny camped alone near this very spot. He was quiet and respectful. He swam in the lake and he reverently took a bottle of water from this lake on his fourth visit to it.

That year he met the woman he would marry. Her name was Alberta, my mother.

When he brought Alberta home, he took out this special bottle of water. There, while they sat at the old table in the farmhouse, Johnny told his parents Abram and Katie how happy he was with his new love. Then before they knew what happened, he poured some of the Lake Yale Water on a cloth, wiped his parents' foreheads with it, and said, "My greatest hope is that you will find some of the joy I have known." He asked his father, "Will you sing at our wedding?" something his father had given up years before. He asked his mother, "Will you make them a wedding quilt?" something she had also given up.

Both Abram and Katie, remarkably, agreed. Suddenly, with Johnny now grown, his future wife sitting at the table, and this water from Lake Yale dripping from their foreheads, Abram and Katie saw each other with new eyes, fresh eyes. And for the first time that anyone could remember, Abram and Katie smiled.

Johnny and Alberta, my parents, married. They taught together in a nearby two room school house. Once a month they had music night where all the children of the school and their parents came to that little school from the surrounding farms to sing. My father invited his father and mother. My grandfather not only sang but he also brought out his old violin to play as well.

Everyone could see their fresh eyes smiling.

My dad also invited his father to help teach, to tell the stories of his childhood in Russia and his early work with the Indians in Oklahoma. And

Johnny invited his mother to help the children make a quilt to sell to make extra money for that little school.

The hardness of my grandparents' lives began to soften. Late one night, my father told his parents the adventures of the whale house for the first time, and they laughed and laughed together.

Who knows if this lake water was magic, or if it had special healing powers? But it worked for my father and my grandfather and grandmother.

I hope that you'll think about the magic of these retreats. I hope you start thinking of magic water. I hope you will take some water home. I've got some bottles for you to gather it in. Bring this water to church for our Gathering of Waters service in August and then know that whenever anyone is baptized or whenever anyone dips their fingers in the holy water in the foyer of our church, there is a promise of fresh eyes seeing for anyone who needs it.

For what after all is faith but the assurance that our hopes will happen and the conviction that the dreams we can't see do come true? And what is a retreat, but the discovery of some magic that you can take home?

With this vision we will each have fresh eyes seeing, and we will all be fresh people, you and I, fresh people being.