

Circle Ten WB 98 – Interfaith Sermon 1

Each Wood Badge course has two Interfaith services:

1. The first delivered by staff, in order to not only provide opportunities for Reverence but also to instruct the participants in how to deliver an Interfaith service.
2. The second is delivered by the participants, with coaching provided by the Course Chaplain.

This document includes the sermon from the staff-led service by Jason Buffington, serving as the course Chaplain, during Circle Ten's Wood Badge 98 course, at Philmont in August 2011.

Look around ... at Creation

Many people call this place Scouters' Paradise. Others call it God's Country. Certainly, many of us might agree with both of those sentiments.

This Place

When we want to introduce a sense of reverence in our Scouts (or our families), it often helps to put people in a setting that helps them imagine aspects of their God.

- Inside buildings, we might use a star, or a crescent, or a cross.
- We might add banners, or stained glass, or artwork that represents key stories or tenants of our faith.
- And then, a recognized leader within the organization would then stand up and lead the rest of the participants through a series of events that is somewhat typical for that particular institution.

Today will be a little different <grin>

- First and foremost, I am not a leader within your church, or synagogue, or mosque. In my own church, I am ordained, but as a servant – not as a pastor. In fact, my only suitability to be here today is that (1) I was here last year as a participant in WB94 – and (2) My God has put a passion in my heart for the Reverence that Scouting is supposed to offer and how I might hopefully help other Scouters fulfill that part of our mission as Scout leaders.

- We are not inside a building, nor do we have a shared star, or crescent, or cross. In fact, the only symbols that we share in regard to our faith are the Fluer-de-lis that represents the Scouting movement, and the purple knot that reminds us of the diversity of the Brotherhood of Scouting.
- But most notably, while we do not have banners or man-made artwork – look around !
 - Have you ever seen a stained glass window as beautiful as a Philmont sunset?
 - (NO) – looking for audience participation
 - Have you ever seen a religious painting that gave you the sense of awe from our Creator that those hills show?
 - (NO)
 - As you imagine the tranquility of basking in the comfort of our Creator, draw from the quiet still of this **morning's breeze**, of the **warm glow** of the sun that is rising, in the **eyes of the deer** that walk freely throughout this camp.
 - (YES)
 - THIS place surely is GOD's COUNTRY. It IS Scouters' PARADISE. This is a place that our Creator carved out for us to understand the power and the majesty and the peace of living within our God's will. And while we may not all have the same understanding of Deity, surely this is a place where each of us can recognize our Creator's hand and sovereignty.

PRAYER of Translation

- So, please take a moment of quiet – and open your heart and your mind to your God, in the hope that God will use my imperfect words to reveal our Creator's perfect wisdom.

Other Places

Of course, there are other places to hold a worship service besides Philmont. Like everything else at Wood Badge, the goal is not just to give you experiences that impact you this week, but also to equip you for when you return to your own part of the Scouting experience.

- You may not have an outdoor chapel at the base of Scouting Paradise, but ...
- You have your own campsites
- You have your charter org's building or other meeting place

The place is not as important as your intent to maximize its use to help your Scouts and Scouters to observe Reverence and recognize **their** creator in **their** lives. So, use what you've got. Today, I am going to use what I've got <grin> ... the nature in Scouting's Paradise.

Look around ... at the Plants

Months ago, when I first started praying about what I might offer you today, I thought a lot about the wide range of nature that we would see out here this week. In fact, as the week goes on, you will continue to see an ever growing variety within nature – and perhaps, you might think about our talk this morning.

Let's state the obvious first:

Flowers

- There is more than one kind of flower – and they are all beautiful.
- In fact, there are photographers among us who might spend an afternoon taking amazing pictures of a single bloom. I confess that I am more often even more impressed when I see fields covered in flowers like many of us enjoyed as we drove in over the weekend.
- Just as much, I always find myself staring when a vase or garden is artfully composed of a range of flowers whose colors seem to build on each other.

Trees

There is more than one kind of tree. Again, each is impressive on its own, but ...

- They are perhaps more impactful on our eye when we see them clustered in forests.
- They may be more appreciated when we sit beneath their shaded canopy that they offer collectively.
- Next week, I will be in Boston and folks there are starting to look forward to Fall, when the variety of trees is so easily discernible as their colors independently change with the season.
- And, of course, depending on the tree:
 - it may offer a home or a meal to animals,
 - it might provide a place for birds to rest along their journeys,
 - or it might be destined to be wood – for a beautiful podium that draws us together in Reverence or a campfire that draws us together in warmth and friendship.

Let's think about a single tree for a moment:

(1) Created by our Creator, with an intricacy that man can barely understand but cannot imitate. It is perfect in its lifecycle from (2) starting as a small seed, (3) slowly growing roots as its foundation and key to success, (4) reaching upwards as it grows and prospers, it thrives by receiving nutrients that it cannot create for itself, (5) dropping its own seeds to multiply in a form similar to itself and (6) serving its greatest purpose when it is among others whether similar or varied.

I'm going to repeat that, so that you hopefully see where I am going:

- Created by a Supernatural Creator, with detail and perfect design that man cannot achieve
- Starts as a small seed and slowly grows roots that will be the foundation of its success
- Reaches upwards as it grows and prospers
- Thrives when it receives nutrients, and in most cases, the more nutrients, the better it thrives – often growing not just incrementally but exponentially as it is nurtured
- Multiplies by consistently reproducing itself
- Most effective when it is among others, whether nearly identical or greatly varied, as long as it is not alone

Are we really talking just about plants anymore?

Look around ... at us

This is what I hope you will take away from the message this morning – YOU ARE:

Created by a Creator

- You are supernaturally made – and your design is perfect:
 - Your lungs take in oxygen and release carbon dioxide, which not only works perfectly well for you, it is in perfect design and symbiosis with our plant friends who take in CO₂ and give back oxygen
 - You have amazing crafted engineering, including the neural pathways of your mind, the electrical conduit of your nervous system, and the superhighway of your heart and blood
- And you are beautiful, both in the eyes of your Creator, as well as those around you who love you.

How you grow

You Start Small and Grow Up from Your Roots

Your life started with our Creator's perfect design – as a tiny seed.

At first, you were weak and frail. You built a system of roots (a foundation) that was mostly a factor of your environment. For most of us, the better the environment, the better your roots grew. For most plants, your foundation is rooted in the soil (pun intended).

Some soil is rich and you almost can't help but get all that you need and want.

Some of you come from climates where you had to reach out on your own to get the nutrients that you needed. You've been on hard places that toughened you and you grew through it. Some plants are like that too. Their roots will extend further in one direction over another, if they gain better nutrients from a certain direction – or even perhaps nearby water.

Be careful that you don't find yourself in the wrong soil.

Did you know that **not all plants need soil**, per se. Most do, but of course, there are cactus that persevere on hard sand or clay. There are other plants, referred to as hydroponics, that actually live on/in water, with no solid foundation at all. If you put a plant used to hydroponics in the dirt, it won't thrive because it wasn't designed for that.

If we map that back to our conversation today on Interfaith Worship – we don't all have the same soil either. In our case, our heritage and environment have given us different perceptions of who or what our creator is.

Putting a Jewish Scouter in an evangelical Christian worship service will not enable that Jewish scouter to thrive any more than putting a water-based plant in soil. It isn't the soil's fault that the plant cannot thrive there, but it is the planter's. Scouters – we are the planters, when it comes to Interfaith Worship within our units.

It's our job to make sure that we aren't asking a sand based plant to try to float in water, or a scout to be in a worship service that they not only won't thrive in but may actually cause confusion with their own spiritual development.

Regardless of what kind of soil that we are planted on, as long as we designed for it, then we will thrive at a certain pace. As we get more nutrients, we will thrive more.

That is why you are here this week – to get nutrients, so that you will thrive!

Brothers and Sisters in Scouting, that is what we are doing this morning. As part of our Worship Service today, we are reaching up to our fuel source, to our creator. And the more that we prosper and thrive, the more important that it is to continue reaching higher, both in **aspiration** and **appreciation**.

Sermon Wrap up

OK, let's wrap this up with a few suggestions for you to consider:

- 1) If you are an apple tree, don't try to make oranges. Be authentic in who you are; and help the best of what you are be amplified in others.
- 2) As great as it is to sit under apple tree and enjoy the shade, an apple tree isn't great because it offers shade. It's great because it makes apples. And the trees that are most appreciated are those that make the best apples – sometimes by quantity, sometimes by quality, preferably both.
- 3) Remember, if you were created as an apple tree, life is not about you growing higher, it's about you producing apples – some apples will be fuel for others, and some will become apple trees (leaders) like you some day.
- 4) You are better together. Like most flowers and trees, you are most effective when you are among others. It doesn't mean that we are all the same. Sometimes, a single red rose amongst white carnations is exactly what is needed. In other cases, an orchard of apple trees is better than just a few. Just know that we, like those plants, are designed to be part of something bigger.
- 5) Seek out nutrients. Sometimes, you will find yourself in a place where good stuff just keeps landing on you. Bask in it. Take advantage of it. Thrive while you can. In other times, nutrients may seem sparse, so be intentional in stretching out your roots, and reach for what you need.

6) As you thrive, reach up! Just like we are doing today – and we will do again as a Troop on Saturday. Do Not Forget that your source of fuel is your creator (not just the environment around you or your own efforts).

This is why you are here in Scouting – to be a tree that produces great fruit.

That is why you are here at Philmont – to gain new nutrients.

That is why you are here in this service – to reach up

And the expected response from all of this is for you to thrive, not just for yourself but in what you will do with it when you return home.