

Chapel Words (September 18, 2008) — Rev. Jim Holland

I must have been 7 years old or so the summer my big sister taught me how to ride a bicycle. I remember that summer vividly because it was the summer of my first real adventure. My father bought me a second-hand, bright red bicycle; and soon after, on a hot and sunny August morning I took off on that little bike.

If you are a cyclist you know the feeling of freedom that can only come with a long bike ride by yourself on a beautiful summer day. This feeling of freedom must have taken hold of me, because once I started riding, I couldn't stop. I just rode and road and rode. I was like a bicycle-riding Forest Gump.

My family home at the time was in Virginia, just outside of Washington, D.C. The city was about as far from my house as we are from Victoria. Before I knew it, I had arrived at the bridge which crosses the Potomac River from Virginia into D.C. And still, I did not stop. I crossed the bridge into Washington. And proceeded to bike up and down the city streets. I remember the amazed and startled looks of people, who no doubt were wondering what a little boy was doing on his bicycle in busy downtown traffic.

When I finally decided to go home I was of, of course, hopelessly lost. I remember the concern and apprehension of the women who explained to me the route back to Virginia. She kept asking "Are you sure you're alright?" And I kept responding, "I'm fine. I have my bike!"

When I got home my mother asked me where I had been and I told her I had ridden my bike into the city. "Oh, that's nice, honey," she said, no doubt assuming that my imagination was just particularly active that day. Several days later when we drove into Washington to pick my father up from work, I begin to point out places where I had ridden earlier in the week. My mother finally realized that I was telling the truth. I won't repeat in chapel what she said. Needless to say, she was not pleased.

I say this was my first adventure, because I have had quite a few little adventures since. I have always love adventures. I have always related far more to Biblo and Frodo than to the rest of the Hobbits. I have always agreed with Helen Keller's sentiment that life is either one big adventure, or it is nothing.

Sometimes my yearning for adventure has gotten me into trouble, but I have never regretted a moment of it.

One of the things I have come to realize is that everyone yearns for adventure and challenge. And we can find negative and harmful ways to fulfill that yearning, or we can find

positive, growth-producing adventures. There is sometimes a fine line between adventure and recklessness.

What I have come to believe is that adventure—whether it is climbing Mount Everest, or riding our bicycle somewhere we have never been before, or winning the Henley Cup—; true adventures are not so much about where we go or even what we do, as much as they are about what happens in our heads and in our hearts.

There are people who can go on an African safari, take a few photos and remain unchanged by the experience, and there are others who can have the greatest adventure imaginable sitting by the lake with a good book.

Our adventures are by design very unique and personal to us, because they are ultimately about going to the limits of our lives, the limits of our physical stamina, our intellectual capacity, our creative abilities, and even our core beliefs and then looking over the edge and asking ourselves, what is there yet to learn, yet to accomplish? Adventure starts when we take a step over that edge.

Isn't that what Shawnigan is all about? To encourage one another to explore the limits of our capabilities and to go beyond them? To go higher and faster, and to be stronger.

And as students at Shawnigan, you have guides to help you on your personal adventures. These are people who know what it is to face their personal limitations and find ways to go beyond them. These are people whose personal adventures now involve assisting and guiding you in yours, to guide you into healthy and safe adventures.

But we know that adventures are never really safe, because whenever we chose to explore our full capabilities, we are also choosing to go beyond our comfort zone. We are choosing, whether on the rugby field or the lake or the classroom or the stage, to move out of what is comfortable and easy for us. And when we do that we enter into unknown territory, and we never know where we are going to end up.

I end with a quote from Gandalf (who else):

“Remember what Bilbo used to say: It's a dangerous business going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to.”