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The Grateful Heron of Popple Lake

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. Psalm 100:4.

I n the fall of 1992 we moved into our rustic house on the shores of Popple Lake in northern Minnesota. Never mind that it was not a *Better Homes and Gardens* house. Let it not bother you that we had plain plywood floors and running water only at the pressure tank, the toilet, and the bathtub. My dear wife was content with old metal shop cabinets in the kitchen until better cabinets could be built. And if you wanted to go out the back door, you descended a wide plank to the ground. We were truly grateful to be in our house and planned to continue the finishing touches over the next year or more.

Late one afternoon, I sat down at the table for supper, which was nearly ready.

Suddenly one of my sons exclaimed that there was a big bird down near the lake. I looked out the large window and saw a great blue heron flapping its wings. It rose just slightly and then fell down. I saw with alarm that it was hanging by its neck in a tree.

As quickly as the excited boys and their daddy could move, we opened the back door, bounded down the plank, and ran through the garden area to the row of trees along the lake-shore. The heron had somehow gotten its neck caught in the crotch of a small sapling about five feet above the ground. At our approach it tried again to fly out of its trap, but failed. It then sank down heavily, its whole body hanging by its neck, caught in the crotch.

It felt wild and wonderful to be so close to this huge bird. I remember the respect I felt as I looked at that long sharp beak. Its eye watched us with a piercing stare. We knew we had to do something quickly.

My son secured its legs to keep them from flailing as I grasped the bird, holding its wings tightly against its body. Together we lifted as high as we could and soon had its neck released from the crotch. I wondered what that beak attached to that long neck could do to my eyes, as we worked with arms fully outstretched. We lowered the bird and carried it down the bank to the edge of the marsh. Carefully setting it on the ground, we stepped back to see what would happen next. To our relief and delight, the huge bird started stepping slowly and sedately out into the marsh.

At supper a few minutes later, we wondered aloud how the heron had gotten itself into that predicament. We were certain that had we not been there, it would have died hanging in that tree. We were grateful we could spare its life.

The very next day, Juanita spotted a great blue heron gliding in and alighting on the yard right in front of the house. Never before nor since has our yard been graced by this majestic ornament. The bird faced the house and seemed as if it were there on business. Several of us went out and stood on the front steps to observe this wonder. About that time

our dog came racing around the corner of the house, and the heron quickly spread its wings and lifted into the blue. We wonder to this day if that bird came back to offer thanks to us for sparing its life.

In the Bible we read of the Master sparing ten men of a continuing life of misery and ostracism due to their leprosy. Out of the ten who were cleansed, only one came back to thank Jesus for delivering him.

We whose lives have been redeemed by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ have so much to be grateful for and to testify of. Our salvation is not for this life only, but for all eternity. So spread your wings very early tomorrow morning, and touch down boldly in the front yard of His majesty on high. Tell God how grateful you are for His salvation and the grace He gives you to live for Him.



A Good Catholic

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Acts 4:12.

I had heard that his name was John, that he had hay to sell, and that he had cancer. The farmers I had purchased hay from in the past had none to sell this year, so I decided to contact John. Yes, he still had several hundred bales and was happy to sell some more. The price was right, so my daughter and I got into our old pickup truck, borrowed a trailer from a neighbor, and drove to John's farm.

After we saw the hay, I told John we would take two loads. That afternoon after we had loaded the second load, I paid John and thanked him for selling us his hay. Then I turned to him.

"John, I was told you have cancer," I stated questioningly.

"Yep," he answered. "I do. If you ever have any prostate trouble, don't fool around and put off getting it checked out like I did, 'cause after a while, there's not much can be done for it."

I had not known John before that day and did not know where he stood regarding salvation. I did not know how