

God of Creation, tend our souls, open our hearts and bless these words,
that what is spoken and what is heard, might bring glory to your name.
Amen

As I'm sure you all know, I'm just back from two weeks off. Between Covid stress and moving two households over the last few months, I needed some time to stop, breathe, reground myself and reconnect with the Holy. A time to let my spirit catch up with my body.

So I did what all good clergy types do, I bought books. Prayer books, devotional books, books that might provide me with food for thought, prayer, and meditation.

Instead, of finding God in the words on paper, I found my solace, my peace, my re-grounding and reconnecting, out in the natural world.

I spent time in the mornings, sitting on my deck, letting the sound of spring birdsong open me to what the new day was bringing;

I strolled through marshlands, pausing to watch the red-wing blackbirds flutter from grass to grass, courting their mates with song and beauty;

I sat under the canopy of a weeping willow, watching and listening to the waters dance over the rocks of the streambed;

I paused for immeasurable moments, watching the slow methodical movements of the turtles, sunning themselves on tree trunk patios.

I took long, deep breaths of fragrant spring air, releasing that same breath back into the atmosphere for the trees to recycle.

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. You make me to lie down in green pastures. You lead me beside still waters. You restore my soul.”

After a couple of weeks in nature, I couldn't help but notice the images used by the Psalmist to describe what it takes for soul renewal. There isn't a single word about books on prayer and reflection! Go figure!

I suppose that's not to say such things aren't valuable to refresh our spirits, get us through difficult times, but the psalmist chooses, instead, to turn, as I did, to the natural world. A world that we take so for granted. A world that, even with the best of intentions, we sometimes disregard, abuse, or at best ignore all together.

Being married to the Queen of Wild Church, I hear more and more about our relationship to the land and how connected we are to all things. Our conversations often include questions like, does creation love us back? Can it?

How do you listen for God in the midst of the natural world?

Do the trees have something they want to tell us?

Do we ever give thanks or bless the waters that we are completely dependent on and flow so freely in this area?

These questions may sound odd to some, but I wonder if they aren't pertinent to today's reading. Why else would the Creator "make us to lie down in green pastures", or "lead us beside still waters" if there isn't something there for us to learn, something of the Holy for us to experience, some gratitude that we are called to acknowledge?

Indigenous people understand this. From the very beginning, they have acknowledged the inter-connectedness of all things. They learn from infancy to bless the water, give thanks to the animals who give their lives for the sustenance of humans, to walk gently on this land that provides for our every need. They even have a term for it - "all my relations".

Richard Wagamese, an Ojibway writer, speaker & storyteller, explains it like this:

*"I've been considering the phrase "all my relations" for some time now. It's hugely important. It's our saving grace in the end. It points to the truth that we are all related, that we are all connected, that we all belong to each other. The most important word is "all." Not just those who look like me, sing like me, dance like me, speak like me, pray like me or behave like me. ALL my relations. That means every person, just as it means every rock, mineral, blade of grass, and creature. We live because everything else does. If we were to choose collectively to live that teaching, the energy of our change of consciousness would heal each of us – and heal the planet."*¹

We each know the dark valleys we have walked through in our lives and how we have found strength, courage, persistence and whatever else we needed to get through, as we trusted in the presence of God.

I wonder if the rest of creation feels the same way. In the midst of global warming, unconscionable mining practices, clear-cutting of old growth forests – how does creation make it through these dark valleys?

It certainly doesn't give up, die off, leave nothing but barren land. Instead, it seems to me, God is at work there too – renewing, re-establishing, ever evolving and adapting the billions of aspects of creation, so that it can be sustained despite humanities foibles and lack of consideration.

As God provides for us, God also provides for the rest of creation, setting a table in the presence of its enemies, that it might overflow with beauty, wonder and wisdom.

I wonder if, when the psalmist invites us to find solace in creation, we are also being invited to offer solace – to acknowledge our interconnectedness, our reliance on one another. I wonder if we are being encouraged to see, as Wagamese states, that:

We live because everything else does. And if we are then called to choose collectively to live that teaching, so that the energy of our change of consciousness might heal each of us – and heal the planet.

Hard to imagine, I know, but maybe Psalm 23 isn't all about us! Or at least, not just us. Maybe it is calling us to be attentive to the natural world, to recognize our need for each other and to live accordingly.

This past Thursday was Earth Day. Perhaps you knew that, perhaps you forgot, perhaps you had no idea. But now, you know! So, to honour this earth, to honour God, to honour our inter-connectedness, I encourage you to

- take a walk,
- talk to a tree ... and listen for a response
- lie down in a greening field and listen for the voice of the Holy,
- give thanks the waters that sustain us, ...

live Psalm 23, not just for your sake, but for the sake of all of creation, all of the natural world, all our relations; so that we and future generations might, indeed, dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen

ⁱ Wagamese, Richard. Embers: One Ojibway's Meditations. Douglas-MacIntyre. 2016. Madeira Park, BC.