

“Bird watching”

Sermon on September 9, 2018
Creation season 2

Job 39:13-18

Psalm 84

Gospel:

Weird and wonderful creation
Even the birds find rest in God's
sanctuary

Matthew 6:25-27

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

Have you ever found yourself getting entangled in anxiety and worries, and the more you try to reason the worries away, the tighter they wrap the cord around your heart? Before long your breath gets shallower and faster and you feel dizzy and like you're about to pass out with anxiety? And then someone comes in and says words to you that are so calm and simple and kind and right on, that the anxiety lets loose for a moment and you

begin to look about you and put things into perspective. And you share in the calm the other person brought to you?

That must have been the situation Jesus spoke the words we just heard.

To someone or a group of people who were so overwhelmed by the demands of life that anxiety ate them up.

Perhaps they were small farmers who found their taxes and tributes go up in a year of fickle weather and bad harvest.

How will I be able to feed my family and pay the landlord? Will I go to debtors prison? Will my daughters get taken for maid and who knows what other services? Perhaps there was another in the crowd whom Jesus knew and knew they just can't afford the clothes that are required for attending the wealthy patrons wedding. *Will I be shunned? Ridiculed? Should I steal? Or borrow with money I don't have? Or use my brothers clothes? How people will talk!*

And comes that gentle voice that puts their worries into perspective:

Do not worry about your life. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

Look at the birds. A wise way of redirecting attention from the worried ME to the greater network of God's creation.

Many people today like to look out from their windows to the bird feeders, be they office workers or seniors-their bird watching has indeed a calming effect on a stressed out mind.

Jesus pointed his followers to the birds but pointed further and beyond them, to God. Jesus had an immense trust in God's goodness. Jesus trusted that God provides for you and me.

Our modern minds have trouble with that concept.

When it comes to being provided for we look to insurance policies and trust funds, not to God. We trust our doctors. Our partners, children, our ability to make ends meet. But is that enough?

There could be something missing-and that missing piece leads to a great desire to be in control.

We want control because we do not trust life overall. We do not trust God. I understand: We are in a period of unprecedented rapid change where many institutions that used to give us stability are faltering and become ineffective or corrupt.

But when our ability to control slips away, because we

lose mental or physical or economical strength - what do we do? Become extremely anxious and unhappy.

The only way out may be to cultivate trust in the overall goodness of the life God gives.

Julian of Norwich, one of the great Christian women of the 14th century

dedicated her life to prayer and spent much of it in a cell where she read, prayed and wrote.

During a time of severe illness she had 15 “showings”, or intense mystical experiences, and this is what she wrote about one of them:

In my folly, before this time I often wondered why, by the great foreseeing wisdom of God, the onset of sin was not prevented: for then, I thought, all should have been well. This impulse [of thought] was much to be avoided, but nevertheless I mourned and sorrowed because of it, without reason and discretion.

*“But Jesus, who in this vision informed me of all that is needed by me, answered with these words and said: ‘It was necessary that there should be sin; but all shall be well, and **all shall be well**, and **all manner of thing shall be***

well.’ “These words were said most tenderly, showing no manner of blame to me nor to any who shall be saved.”

(Quote from: Christian History Institute #31)

Mmh. What would it take for you and me to cultivate the trust that all shall be well?

Look at the birds of the air. Breathe. Watch them. Take your attention away from your worried self, into the larger world of creation, of nature. Watch the chickadee and the redpoll. So tiny and fragile; here they are and they find their food somehow and they are beautiful and elegant. Their lives are short but precious to God.

Look at the geese – how they find their way south and back in ways we can not comprehend. Trust life. Trust your inner compass which will lead you where you can find

sustenance and rest.
Look at the loons- shy and beautiful, at home under water and on the water and in the air but clumsy on land and too heavy to take flight, yet your heavenly father feeds them...None of us can be excellent at everything.

Look at the sandpiper and the crane, look at the grosbeak and the thrush, the mighty eagle and the tiny hummingbird...Look and let them teach you.

They live in the moment, here and now. Do you have food for today? Do you have friends at your side today? Do you have a roof over your head and a neighbour you can call today?

Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

Now I have that quarreling little voice inside of me, the voice of the sceptic and rational side of me which says: we all know that the birds struggle as much as humans do these days. Pollution clogs

their guts and poisons their brains. They loose their roof over their heads as large acreages of forest are clear cut and ground up for pulp. They loose their young to an abundance of stray cats. Migratory birds are hunted and trapped for sport or food. A bird's life is not carefree by no means.

True. But when we watch them, and for that matter many an animal in the wild, we have a chance to re adjust our view of our place in the cosmos. As they are part of the greater whole of God's creation so are we. We all depend on the health of nature. While we all plan and act to protect life on this planet we try to cultivate what Buddhists call mindfulness.

This now very popular word is something that Jesus taught us in the very words we focus on today: Do not worry about the future. Be present in the here and now. Watch the birds, how they flutter about without worrying about the future.

The Christian philosopher Blaise Pascal wrote:

"Let each one examine his thoughts, and he will find them all occupied with the past and the future. We scarcely ever think of the present; and if we think of it, it is only to take light from it to arrange the future. The present is never our end. So we never live, but we hope to live; and, as we are always preparing to be happy, it is inevitable we should never be so."

Blaise Pascal, Pascal's Pensees)

Whoever is always preparing to be happy never is happy.

What if, instead of succumbing to intense worry about the future, we took threats to our life seriously and still did our very best today to heal that environment which birds and humans need equally. Jesus' words do not give us the right to be complacent and naive. But they do give us the right to take a deep breath. And pause. And look. And watch the birds at the feeder or the geese in the sky...and nutrition but the sharing of this food, it is

feel ourselves at one with them.

We humans are beloved and are even more intricate and wonderfully made than the birds. We are all part of the same creation, aren't we? They can teach us something, as they taught Jesus: Do not worry, about the little things, the mechanics of how am I going to do this or that? Do what is needed today to get better. Do what is needed today to feed and to be fed. To be healed and to heal.

(Pointing to the communion table:)

A table is set here- modest, like the modest environment we find ourselves in today. Doesn't it speak loudly without words of what I've been trying to say with clumsy words?

The essentials are here. Bread and Grape Juice. A bit of food for this day. And

Food for the Soul more than food for the body.

Eat and drink, we will hear in a moment,
words from Jesus

and trust that God provides for you.

While a lot of bread is not good for birds,
perhaps after communion, we could share
just a few crumbs with the forest
creatures, to say that we will to care for
you, too.

Amen.