

THE Furrow

“Worship in Place”
September 2020

Gathering Reflection

“When we pay attention to nature's music, we find that everything on Earth contributes to its harmony” - Hazrat Inayat Khan

Call to Worship (from Psalm 96:9-13) ¹

Worship YHWH, majestic in holiness;
Tremble in God's presence, all the earth!

***Say among the nations,
“YHWH reigns supreme!”***

The world stands firm and unshakable:
YHWH will judge each nation with strict justice.

***Let the heavens be glad; let the earth rejoice;
Let the sea roar and all that it holds!***

Let the fields exult and all that is in them!

Let all the trees of the forest sing for joy

At the presence of YHWH, for God is coming.

God is coming to rule the earth –
To rule the world with justice
And its peoples with truth!

Hymn of Wonder

“Teach Me, God, to Wonder,” words by Walter Farquharson, 1973 ²

*Teach me, God, to wonder,
Teach me God, to see,
Let your world of beauty capture me.*

REFRAIN

¹ *The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, inc. 2007

² *Voices United: The Hymn and Worship Book of the United Church of Canada, Ontario*: United Church Publishing House, 1996

*Praise to you be given, love for you be lived,
Life be celebrated, joy you give.*

*Let me, God, be open,
Let me loving be
Let your world of people speak to me.*

*Let me, God, be ready,
Let me be awake,
In your world of loving my place take.*

*Teach me, God, to know you,
Hear you when you speak,
See you in my neighbour when we meet.*

Prayer of Awareness

We routinely pray with the Psalmist, O God, that the “words of our mouth and the meditations of our heart be acceptable to you,” but we pray this day for more. We pray that the vision of our eyes and the perception of our ears discern your presence and voice in the manifold witness of creation, and the humility of our spirit make room beside us for the holiness that surrounds us. We offer these prayers to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

A Reading

“How Can I Walk By”

- A Poem by Kai Siedenburg
*How can I just walk by
when the delicate green ferns
are unfurling so perfectly?*

*When the
brave little mosses
are stepping out
in their finest green fronds,*

*knowing
this is their time
to shine?*

*When pale gray branches
that have slept all winter
are giving birth*

*to countless
bright green leaves?*

*How can I just walk by
without stopping to greet
these beloved friends,
to praise their beauty,
to honor their patient
and generous labors.*

*I want to bow down
before their humble glory.*

*I want to kiss the ground
they grow in.³*

Hymn

“All Praise to You”, words by Omer Westendorf, 1984 ⁴

*All praise to you, O God of all creation:
you made the world, and it is yours alone.
The planet earth you spun in its location
amid the stars adorning heaven’s dome.
We lease the earth but for a life’s duration
yet for this life it is our cherished home.*

*With wondrous grace you clothed the earth in splendor;
with teeming life you filled the sea and land.
Instil in us a sense of awe and wonder
when we behold the bounty of your hand.
Then when we hear the voice of bird or thunder,
we hear the voice our faith can understand.*

*To tend the earth is our entrusted duty,
for earth is ours to use and not abuse.
O gracious God, true source of all resources,
forgive our greed that wields destruction’s sword.
Then let us serve as wise and faithful stewards
while earth gives glory to creation’s Lord.*

³ *Poems of Earth and Spirit*, by Kai Siedenburg. Our Nature Connection Publishing, 2017

⁴ *Voices United: The Hymn and Worship Book of the United Church of Canada*.

Pastoral Prayer

O God, in whose image we are made – “fearfully, wonderfully made” – we give you thanks for your fingerprints upon us, for your breath within us, and for your imagination surrounding us. Regardless of our bank account, we are wealthy, indeed, and we pause; staggered at the abundance of your presence. We confess that though the awareness of our identity should inform our living with gratitude, and shape it with the constant ache to honor you with imitation, too often we wield it as a prideful weapon. In arrogance or ignorance we cast our uniqueness as singularity, and thereby miss the uniqueness of all else that surrounds by your creative hand.

Open our eyes, we pray, to the beauty of your presence in stone and stem, in feather and frond, in pinecone and prairie, in seed and in sea; in these, and in those we have yet to encounter but pray to meet with awe and welcome.

May such honored welcome extend, as Jesus taught us, to the stranger of all kinds, the naked, the hungry, the homeless, the lost, the forgotten, and those whose shoulders bear the constant footprints of the powerful. May they meet in us not merely friend, but your own face, and joyful smile.

We pray in the name of Jesus, who met us with just such joy and grace. Amen.

Scripture Reading Matthew 13:44⁵

“The kingdom of heaven is like a buried treasure found in a field. The ones who discovered it hid it again, and, rejoicing at the discovery, went and sold all their possessions and bought that field.”

Spiritual Tool Options

- Cell phone camera (for “receiving images as gifts”, not “taking photos”)
- Mindfulness Bell app (free, with optional upgrade), or simply your phone’s built-in timer
- Some means of recording experiences - journal, notepaper, voice recorder, etc.

A Walking Homily

- We routinely look for God in the likely places - sanctuaries and chapels -mountain vistas or ocean beaches, forest streams and waterfalls. And God is surely in those places.
- But God is just as surely not confined to those vivid settings. Consider Jesus’ observation that the “kingdom of heaven is like a buried treasure found in a field.” Hidden, for all practical purposes, beneath our feet.
- Set a timer for 15-30 minutes. You choose the time frame for your “treasure hunt.”

⁵ *The Inclusive Bible.*

- Take a slow and patient walk outside. Observe carefully those elements named in the Creation account of Genesis 1 – planets, stars, water ways, dry land, fauna and flora, people. Attend to obscurities that you haven't before noticed, but pay fresh attention to the common elements of your landscape.
- Select one such element for deeper consideration – a bush, perhaps, or a stone; hanging fruit, or an ant. You needn't hold or grasp it; simply honor it with the wonder of your attention.
- Receive as a gift an image of this "buried treasure" with your camera.
- When your timer alerts you, find a quiet place to sit with your images, your journal, and your thoughts.
- Reflect on the element you selected. With your camera's image, view it again. What is it? How did it come to be in your path? What is its role? In what way does it occupy its space? Imagine and inventory the way its "matter" matters.
- Consider it as not merely an "object," but as a "subject." What is the treasure buried within it that manifests something of the glory and intention of God?
- Consider the countless other elements within your circumference you could have chosen. Imagine the treasures manifesting some of God's intention quite literally all around you. What about God might you learn from them?
- Journal your observations and insights, and consider sharing something of your experiences via the "Contact Us" tab at TheFurrow.org. We will look forward to posting a collage of the responses we receive.
- Close with a prayer of self-offering, and for a heightened awareness of and gratitude for the holy treasures available for discovery.

Eucharist

On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The gift of the grain; the gift of the grape – holy bearers of God's gift of grace. Let us pray.

Wondrous God, we give you thanks for your relentless love, and offer ourselves afresh to be humble recipients of it, but determined expressions of it as well. Finding its evidence yet again in these common elements, may our vision be sharpened to look beyond them as well to see your purpose and presence in all that surrounds us. Amen.

Offertory

We can be prone to focus at length on our hungers – our deficiencies and the ache we feel to satisfy them. Perhaps they are physical, or financial; very likely they are relational

and spiritual. Without denying or minimizing any of those truths, consider an additional truth: that like that single element you considered earlier, you, too, are something of a “buried treasure.” In what ways do you manifest something of the kingdom of God? How is God’s intention expressed in the “subject” that is you?

In this offering there is no plate to pass; there is only a life to live. How will you uncover and expose the treasure that is buried in the field that is you?

Benediction

Hold closely this sacred reminder:

Sometimes I need

Only to stand

Wherever I am

To be blessed.

—Mary Oliver