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**Green Blades Preaching Roundtable**

Reflections on the texts

Holy Trinity Sunday

June 4, 2023

John 16:12-15 (Year C)

Rachel Wyffels, Luther Seminary, St. Paul MN

Last week, we celebrated the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. In two very different accounts, we hear about the paraclete, the advocate that Jesus promises to send. In the gospel of John, the disciples experience the promise of the Holy Spirit as a balm in the midst of sadness and trepidation, having been told by Jesus that he is about to die in a violent and horrible way. In Acts, the promise of the Holy Spirit feels quite different. We experience the disciples emboldened to bring Jesus’s message of grace and reconciliation to many nations of the ancient Mediterranean world. They are no longer behind locked doors, but out in public life accompanied by the promised advocate, the Holy Spirit, which comes with the sound of a rushing wind and rests on them like tongues of fire.

Today, we return to the liminal space of John’s gospel in those final, precious moments that Jesus has with his friends before his betrayal and crucifixion. In hopes of comforting his friends, Jesus uses these moments to describe how he is fully present in the Holy Spirit, this advocate that he will send to be with them, even though they will not see him. As we heard today, what the Father has becomes the son’s, and the spirit receives what is the son’s and declares it. This network of giving and receiving, of pouring out and being filled, reflects the very life of God. The good news for us this Holy Trinity Sunday is that interdependence is a holy reality. We also receive the call not only to observe but to participate in this active exchange within Godself.

In reflecting further on what holy interdependence means for us and for all of creation, I want to share with you an experience I had that deepened my understanding of God’s presence in our world. In my job, I have the joy of working with several groups that work on many different (but related) issues. One of those groups is the St. Paul Area Synod Care of Creation Work Group. They work through advocacy and educational opportunities for systemic solutions to the crisis of our rapidly warming planet. One of the areas that they are focused on this year is regenerative agriculture. “Regenerative Agriculture” is a bit of a fuzzy term, and so to learn more about regenerative farming practices, they reached out to local farmers George and Annalise Walker, who graciously invited us to their farm in Princeton, Minnesota. We visited the Walker Farm on a beautiful October Saturday.

As George and Annalise welcomed us, we started talking about what regenerative practices are. One of the major practices that they highlighted for us is no tillage. The reason for this is that tilling disrupts the microbial ecology of the soil, notably fungi. It is here, at this miniscule level, that countless relationships are at play and organisms bring life to each other. Fungi are basically natural recycling bins. Crops produce sugar, then fungi absorb that sugar and release soil nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus, and water back to the roots of the plant. What I find most amazing is that the strength of fungi comes from the fact that they are multi-celled organisms. Unlike bacteria, their single-celled counterparts, they can transfer nutrients feet or meters long, and through gaps in the soil. It’s this interconnectedness between cells and organisms and between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that provides nutrients (our daily bread, if you will), bridges gaps that would be impossible to do alone, and generates new life.

This blessed interdependence that is so foundational for healthy soil also takes a lot of work. As the Walkers shared with us, one of the major barriers to farmers who are looking into these regenerative practices is the steep upfront investment. Cover crops, another major component of regenerative agriculture, are a perfect example. Cover crops transform the soil by increasing biodiversity, promoting water retention, and preventing erosion, but the cost for seeds is high and it takes about five years for the benefits to take effect. In the life of the church, we might think about this steep upfront investment in terms of relationships. We need to put a lot on the line in building, trusting, and growing relationships to support a healthy church, and the transformation may take several years to show itself.

I was also struck by the Walkers' initiative and creativity in innovation. One problem that they encountered was: If you want turkeys to graze in the field and therefore don’t keep them in a barn, how do you keep them from getting lost? The farmer George and his brother Andy invented a lightweight frame that keeps the turkeys within a certain area, but can easily be moved by a tractor to bring them to a fresh spot every day. It’s at this point where I saw the importance of grace. Since George had been so generous in talking with us that morning, he was a few hours later than usual in moving the turkeys to a new spot. They were not happy. Similarly, we are going to need to do the work of new structures and new ideas to support a healthier church. There will be days when we’re late and the turkeys aren’t happy. As long as the turkeys get fed, it’s ok if we get delayed sometimes.

In all of the promise and pouring out that comes with the holy work of interdependence, we also witness the promise of resurrection. As we were going over to see the cows, George found a plant near the grazing area and shouted out with excitement, telling us that it was the first time he had seen the plant on the farm. In many classifications, this plant would be considered a weed. But not to the Walkers. The plant is a native plant, and as they work to regenerate the soil through those microbial relationships, the native plants start to return. Plants that haven’t been seen in years or even decades suddenly start to pop up.

I want to leave you today with the question of what healing and restoration we will see as we participate in the active, interdependent exchange at the very heart of God’s being. What will we find and shout out with excitement like the farmer George did as we are called into new relationship with God, our neighbors, and all of creation? Reconciliation? Joy? Peace? Justice? Compassion? May we engage in this work as the spirit continues to guide us into all the truth.

*Rachel Wyffels is a first year Master of Divinity student at Luther Seminary. She is the Communication Coordinator for the EcoFaith Network NE-MN and Saint Paul Area Care of Creation. She previously worked as a Hunger Advocacy Fellow at Lutheran Advocacy-MN on issues of housing and climate legislation. Rachel graduated from St. Olaf College with majors in music and religion in 2021. In her free time, she enjoys knitting, playing violin and singing, and spending time with her dog.*

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Reflections on the texts

Time after Pentecost

June 11, 2023

Hosea 5:15-6:6 ~ Psalm 50:7-15 ~ Romans 4:13-25 ~ Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

Pastor Kristin Foster, Cook, MN

**Mercy, Not Sacrifice Zones**

As you know, the voices from our ancestors’ faith journey, inscribed in our scripture, express a fraught relationship with the practice of sacrifice. The primal murder, fratricide, takes place over Cain’s and Abel’s sacrifices. The testing of Abraham begins with God commanding Abraham to sacrifice his only son and then reversing that command, providing an animal for sacrifice instead of a human child. Myriads of laws in Torah prescribe rituals of sacrifice. In the book of Judges, Jephthah, to ensure that he would have God on his side in battle, sacrificed his daughter to keep his vow to YHWH that he would sacrifice whatever he saw first “coming out of my house to meet me”. Kings proved their wealth, power, and standing before God with staggering levels of animal bloodshed. Think King Solomon dedicating the Temple in Jerusalem. Think the primary function of that Temple, and the enslaved labor of fellow Israelites that it required. As dubious as all this sacrifice sounds, as early Christians grappled with why Messiah Jesus died as he did, sacrifice was one of their primary interpretive frameworks, as in Jesus *became a perfect sacrifice of atonement for our sins.* Sacrifice permeates the biblical witness.

Yet the ancient inscriptions of a people’s faith journey which are that Bible also contain powerful objections to sacrifice. These repudiations are not voiced as human resistance to giving God something people would rather keep for themselves. No, the objections to sacrifice appear in scripture as from the voice of God. It is God who says, **I don’t want your sacrifices. I want your heart***.* It is God who says, **I don’t need your sacrifices. The whole creation belongs to me.**

The scriptural inscriptions for this Sunday repudiate sacrifice with divine ferocity. In the Hosea reading, this repudiation startles us at the end of a dialogue between Israel and God, in which the people appeal to God for mercy, and God rejects their appeal as specious, evanescent like morning dew. The people’s call to ‘return to the Lord’ for hope and healing is, from the prophetic perspective, merely a ploy to avoid real change. The final clincher: “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offering.” (Hosea 6:6).

In the psalmody for this Sunday, the Divine Voice declares “I will not accept a bull from your house, or goats from your folds. ***For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine.”*** (Psalm 50:9-11). Instead of sacrifice, the psalm summons the faithful to what is not really sacrifice, but un-sacrifice, to “sacrifices of thanksgiving”, and to “calling on God in times of trouble”, and to living with integrity in all relationships.

In our gospel portion for this Sunday, Jesus famously includes the verse from Hosea to justify calling a tax collector as a disciple and sharing table fellowship with tax collectors and “sinners”. “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice’” he says. Through this whole pericope, Jesus prophetically acts out this mercy, not only in the call of Matthew and his table fellowship with the unclean, but also in touching the unclean bodies of a dead girl and a hemorrhaging woman. Mercy, steadfast love, trumps the sacrifice system every time.

Lest we consign these passages to a religious argument about sacrifice we have long outgrown, consider the role of sacrifice in our own civilization. Who, and what, and where, do we sacrifice in order that some of us can have what we have? When was the last time you traced your inexpensive clothing back to the wages of the people who made it, or the water that was used, or the chemicals in the fabrication process, or the places where the vast bulk of what is made gets discarded when it is not sold? When did you, eating a mango, consider the orangutans in Indonesia driven toward extinction because their habitat is being clear cut so that we can eat that fruit (or enjoy cookies made with palm oil)? Just who is harvesting our winter broccoli, our oranges, our tomatoes, our cilantro wrapped in plastic and styrofoam, and how much are they being paid? Which rivers, which aquifers, are being sacrificed so that we can head to the golf courses in the southwest to warm our chilled bones? What insects and birds and small mammals are the collateral damage, the sacrificial victims, of our industrial, chemically dependent, monocropping? And what about the island nations and coastal regions we are sacrificing to rising sea levels? Or the once-verdant region of proud land-owning African Americans in Louisiana, now known as Cancer Alley, sacrificed to the god of Petroleum,? Or the old growth forests sacrificed for toilet paper and tar sands oil in Canada, sacrificed for livestock in the Amazon? Or the wild rice rich waterways of our Objibwe siblings, endangered by a pipeline that has already sprung leaks?

Consider this list a litany of *sacrifice zones*. It could be so much longer. The industrial, capitalist, imperialist, nationalistic, supremacist system which gives some of us so many good things, is one giant sacrifice system. Through this system of sacrifice, we worship the insatiable gods we have created for our own insatiable ‘needs’.

The prophetic word of Hosea, spoken and enacted by Jesus, says **No.** No. More. Sacrifice**.** God’s desire is not sacrifice zones of sacrificed people and sacrificed ecosystems. God’s desire is steadfast love for all. Mercy for all. And in this mercy, no created thing, no place, no group of humans, is to be sacrificed. Jesus’ actions in Matthew 9 and throughout the gospel demonstrate what this looks like in particularized ways and places of his ministry.

Which leads us to a disquieting question. Our whole economic system was built and is sustained with sacrifice zones. It is the water in which we swim. So how can we begin to dismantle it? I might boycott palm oil and mangoes, or forego fresh fruit and vegetables in the winter. I might wear only used clothes, and drive a fuel efficient vehicle, but I still participate in this system. Religiously, inextricably.

Moreover, if a primary understanding of Christianity is the sacrificial death of Christ, the *sacrifice to end all sacrifices,* then how is it that we have been sacrificing other lambs of God ever since? (Sometimes, I must say, I wonder if we do more damage to the gospel by giving any role to sacrifice, including by Jesus). In yet another primary Christian understanding of the call of Jesus, we are to live the life he gave his life for us to live. We live to be demonstration plots of that kind of life. We are pollinators of this alternative way of being human for the sake of life. Desiring as God desires.

As the dialogue between the people and God in Hosea makes clear, mercy is not cheap. When we ask God for mercy for ourselves, we are often just asking for exoneration, not a new way of life. We do so wish we could get off the hook, avoid the consequences. Anyway, I do.

You know and I know that our religious devotion to sacrificing life for the sake of our way of life has careening consequences. This green-blue planet we call home may well be on its way to becoming a sacrifice zone. Sometimes all we can do is to practice mercy, steadfastly so, wherever we are, tiny pollinators of God’s desire for all creation. Pollinating a way of steadfast love, whether it is for the person we are tempted to excoriate for their politics or for the people who grow our food and make our clothing or harvest our coffee beans, who become more valuable to us, along with all God’s creation community, than the abundant cheapness of what we eat and drink and wear.

And then there is this: the faith-fullness of Abraham (and Sarah, too, ahem) according to Paul in his epistle to the Romans 4. Abraham is as good as dead, Paul writes, and yet carries on, steadfastly. Abraham, participant in the civilization of his day, still trusts God to open an impossible promise. This God whom Abraham trusts, “brings life to the dead [even a dying earth?], and calls into existence the things that do not yet exist [even an economy based on mercy, not sacrifice?]”.

Abraham was “fully convinced that God was able to do what God had promised”.

What about us?

*Kristin Foster, long term pastor on the Mesabi Iron Range of northern Minnesota, now retired from parish ministry, is the co-chair of the Northeastern Minnesota Synod’s EcoFaith Network and editor of the Green Blades Preaching Roundtable. Over four decades of ministry, including fifteen years as internship supervisor, she has written, preached, and worked for the rights of organized labor, the full inclusion of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, and the empowerment of small communities. As pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Mountain Iron, she was also the founding chairperson of the Iron Range Partnership for Sustainability. She lives outside Cook, Minnesota with her husband, Frank Davis, on an old Swede-Finn farmstead. They take every available opportunity to spend time with their two daughters, their partners, and their three grandchildren.*

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**Green Blades Preaching Roundtable**

Reflections on the texts

June 18, 2023

Pentecost 3

What is God’s Work?

Co-creating with God!

Exodus 19:2-81 ~ Psalm 100 ~ Romans 15:1-8 ` Matthew 9:35 – 10:8(9-23)

The Rev. Greg Kaufmann, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

**Ex. 19:2-8a**

Esther Menn (LSTC) wrote the study notes for Exodus for our Lutheran Study Bible. In her comments on Ex. 19:6 she noted “The Israelites are a ‘priestly kingdom and a holy nation’ – a people set apart for a special calling to do God’s work among the nations. In a similar way, as Christians we all share the work of worshipping God, serving our neighbors, and caring for God’s good creation.”

So what is God’s work? What does it look like? When one couples this idea with Genesis 1 and its creation account, we remember that we relate to all of creation in the same way God does. Dominion or rule in the OT is all about serving, not dominating. How do we serve each other? How do we serve God’s creation? How do we faithfully participate in the ongoing creation process? For further insights into this idea, check out Enter the Bible: <https://enterthebible.org/passage/genesis-126-28-in-the-image-of-god>

A short 1 minute video by Dr. Fretheim sharpens that focus. It can be accessed here:

<https://enterthebible.org/video/understanding-creation-genesis>

What might that mean for us as we face ecological disasters on so many fronts – many of which are directly the result of lifestyle choices we all have made/are making? As God’s holy nation, how might we act differently if we actually believed our baptisms have called us into this holy task?

I love the response of the people in Ex. 19:8 “Everything that the Lord has spoken, we will do.” Where to start is the only question! We know how the Lord loves the creation, and we know what its current condition is. Pick something and start! Maybe it is converting some grass to pollinator friendly habitat in your yard or your congregation. Wondering how to do that? Here is an amazing collection of resources that can help.

<https://www.ecofaithnetwork.org/>

**Psalm 100**

Psalm 100:1 caught my attention right away. “Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.”

It is spring as I write this, and more migratory birds are arriving daily. Talk about making a joyful noise! Nothing quite like a flock of Greater Sandhill Cranes flying low overhead as they swoop in for a landing. I couldn’t help coupling Esther Menn’s observation with the Psalmist’s invitation.

How might we play a role in making it possible for all of the creation to make a joyful noise to the Lord? Or not!

What different choices might we make in almost all aspects of our lives if we stopped to ask a simple question like this: “Does this choice make it easier, harder, or impossible for all of creation to make a joyful noise to the Lord?”

Another way to imagine this is to borrow a perspective from our Native American siblings, who consider the impact of today’s decisions on the next 7 generations.

Psalm 100:3 reminds us whose we are! “It is he that has made us, and we are his. We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.” Since we can trust in God’s promise made to each of us in baptism that we are indeed his, and don’t have to spend our life clawing our way up to heaven, we are free to serve God by serving our neighbors and God’s good creation. OK, I borrowed that idea from Luther! Wondering if there are resources to help you and your congregation actually do that? Check out these resources:

<https://nwswi.org/social-justice-advocacy/creation-care>

**Matt. 9:35 – 10:8 (9-23)**

Matt. 9:35-36 “Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

These familiar words from Matthew 9:35-36 can serve as the background for a lively conversation around the diseases and sicknesses that afflict our current culture. You know your context. Jesus had compassion on the people he met, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. I know a little bit about the imagery Jesus used. My wife and I still live on the farm we purchased in 1980. For several decades we raised sheep – 80 milk ewes, about 300 lambs, along with a 1000 chickens – all rotationally grazed on our then 22 acres of pasture. I learned a lot raising sheep, including how keenly they come to know and trust the voice of their shepherd – my wife, not me! We also learned how rotationally grazing animals on pasture can bring life back to soil that had been row cropped for decades.

I believe our Gospel lesson challenges us to think deeply about the diseases and sicknesses that afflict our planet and all life on it. As sociologists and climatologists have reminded us, many issues of justice are interrelated. Our choices do matter – to the planet as well as the critters, plants and people living on it.

While not a fan of the fad from past years of wearing a bracelet with WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) it does cause us to apply a different lens to choices we make every day. How is our choice either proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, or satisfying my own unique set of desires and needs?

**Romans 5:1-8**

Which brings me to our NT text from Romans 5. Where do we find the courage, much less the will, to ask different questions and make different choices? How do we align ourselves with the marginalized rather than the powerful? Why would we care about the flora and fauna as much as our own comfort? Romans 5:5 suggests an answer: “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” It gets better. Romans 5:8 “God proves God’s love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”

While we were yet sinners! That pretty much sums up my current condition. And probably yours as well if we are both honest.

While I still don’t understand how small choices that I make or my little congregation makes can make a dent in the ecological crisis facing the planet, we gain courage to act, knowing that God didn’t wait until we had this whole salvation thing figured out. While we were yet sinners…while we were yet ruining the very planet that sustains us…while we turned a blind eye to the impact our lifestyle choices make on the most vulnerable populations…Christ died for us.

A few chapters later in Romans (8:18-23) Paul comments on how the entire creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.

I am reminded of one of Paul’s favorite expressions to help his auditors (few people could read) figure out how exactly this new life in Christ should look. You will find these passages helpful as you consider whether or not the effort you put in to live in harmony with God’s good creation is worth it.

* I Cor. 4:16
* I Cor. 11:1
* Gal. 4:12
* Philippians 3:17
* Philippians 4:9
* I Thess. 1:6-7
* 2 Thess. 3:7

May it start with us – today.

A person wearing glasses

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Pastor Greg Kaufmann, recently retired, served congregations in Colorado and Wisconsin between 1975-2000. He served as Assistant to the Bishop of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin from 2000 – June 1, 2023. In 1993 he helped begin that synod's Lay School of Ministry, and currently teaches its Bible courses. In 2000 he helped start his synod’s resource center and still volunteers as its director. He was a member of the ELCA’s Book of Faith leadership team, and currently is part of the ELCA’s Life of Faith Initiative leadership team and the ELCA’s Lay Ministry Programs leadership team. Greg is the Director of the ELCA's Select Learning ministry. Greg has written a number of the quarterly adult Bible studies for Augsburg Fortress, and recently completed a course for Select Learning on the formation of the NT.

<https://www.selectlearning.org/store/all/how-we-got-new-testament-dvd>

When not teaching, writing or volunteering, you can find Greg enjoying his three grandchildren, on top of 14,000 foot mountains in Colorado, canoeing the Boundary Waters, hybridizing daylilies on his farm, or visiting national parks with his wife, Diane, in their RoadTrek camper named Slinky.

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**Green Blades Preaching Roundtable**

**Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, June 25, 2023**

Reflections on the texts

Jeremiah 20:7-13 ~ Psalm 69:7-10, (11-15), 16-18 ~ Romans 6:1-11 ~ Matthew 10:24-39

Sue Lyback, SAM; Holden Lutheran, Isle, MN

I find Jesus’ reassurances comforting when I read Matthew 10:24-39, especially when I consider the continuing challenges facing people of faith these days. I appreciate Jesus’ honesty about how hard it can and will be to follow him. How hard it can be to follow the way of love and life in the midst of dissension and increasing dualism (maybe even duel-isms) among and between family members, communities etc.

But sometimes when I read Matthew 10:31b, I feel like shouting out “NO! The sparrows are just as much of value as we people are! Why did you use this example, Jesus? Didn’t you know it would just deepen humanity’s insistence on the hierarchy that places animals and birds and all of creation beneath human beings??? Didn’t you realize people will take this and run with it in our continuing efforts to prove our superiority and thus further separate ourselves from your creation….and thereby even from you?!”

I get it, of course, sigh. Jesus was simply using an image available to him and readily understandable to others in order to make a point of how much God cares for us. And thankfully, he does acknowledge that the sparrows – even though they aren’t valued very much in at least a monetary way – are valued by God, enough so that not even one of them falls to the ground apart from the Father.

Now, I’m just a lay person with a bachelor’s degree in social work and a minor in Norwegian and religion, so what do I know? I don’t know much about Greek, to be sure! But I did do a little research on the Greek text of these passages in Matthew, and especially behind the word “value” in NRSV’s verse 31. According to Biblehub’s interlinear bible, the Greek word “diapherete” is the basis of the translation into the NRSV’s use of the English word “value”. The Biblehub translation reads as “are worth more”. The root word itself appears to be “diapheró” and according to Strong’s concordance, “diapheró” can be defined in English as “to carry through, carry about, to differ, make a difference, surpass.”

So, I’m left wondering, is it possible Jesus was pointing out the *difference* between sparrows and humans without necessarily trying to suggest that people have so much more inherent worth? Maybe “difference” is enough? Because, clearly, we ARE different. Humankind clearly has more capacity and agency to impact lives and all of creation than sparrows do. We are indeed more response-*able* and thus have far more responsibility! But perhaps having greater capacity and agency does not necessarily mean being of greater worth?

Like I said, what do I know? Not all that much, really, and I’m sure there are folks reading this who have much more insight and knowledge about Jesus’ words as recorded in Matthew’s gospel than I do. But this much I do know. The sparrows do have value, too, no matter how we define the Greek word. And we must not minimize that.

Especially now. Especially in this Kairos time of creation in crisis.

We walk and live in challenging times, brothers and sisters. We are confronted daily with choices to make. Which story\* shall we live into? The story of human dominance over and against nature? The story that fosters economic growth and resource depletion? The story in which the rich get richer and the poor get poorer? The story that minimizes the disenfranchised? The underprivileged? The “different ones”? The vulnerable life on the fringes? The sparrows?

Or do we live into the living story of love? The Story of death to self-absorption and the rebirth of resurrection into truth and meaning, life and renewal? The Story of the One who calls us to follow the way of the cross in love, even if it means being out of step from those around us?

It’s not easy. It’s hard when people revile those who try to protect and care for creation. It’s hard when we’re labeled “d@#< tree-huggers”. It’s not fun to be laughed at and ridiculed because we stand with God’s creation instead of against it. We can understand the lament of Jeremiah, the cries of the psalmist…

And yet we are not left walking alone and without hope. Jesus’s words are for us as well, “those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” And as Paul reminds us in his letter to the Romans, “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

Consider the lilies, remember the sparrows, know that God loves you and all of this amazing creation. Every step of the way, even and especially when it feels scariest. “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul”.

And lastly, lest you doubt the presence of the One’s love in your own life and place, take a moment to step away from your computer and set aside the cell phone. Go outside and breathe. Just breathe. Listen and look. Find a spot of green growing things and savor its closeness. Even if it’s only a flower pot on a windowsill. I pray that you can find a spot where you can hear the sound of birdsong and if you do, take time to be still in that space.

Listen and be assured you are not alone. Your family (including the sparrows) is surrounding you in countless ways, as countless as the hairs on your head. So do not be afraid… Your Father is with you.

May you be assured and strengthened by God’s ever-revealing presence of Love in your own life, the congregation(s) you serve and in whatever place and circumstances you find yourself.

*\* Retired Lutheran campus (ELCA) University of Arizona, Ron Rude (a friend of mine who many years ago was also my pastor at Faith Lutheran in Isle) has been busy writing his understanding of these two stories and their implications for life and creation. His latest book, “Amending the Christian Story” may be a helpful resource for you who are reading this. You can find it on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, etc.*

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Sue Lyback is a retired licensed social worker serving Holden Lutheran (part of two point Zion-Holden Lutheran Parish) in east central Minnesota as a Synod Authorized Minister since early 2021. She is a 2020 graduate of the Christos Center Spiritual Direction Certificate program, a long ago graduate of Augsburg University (when it was still Augsburg College) and is entering the Luther Seminary Justice and Reconciliation MA program this fall. Sue and her husband, Doug Jacobson, are grateful to live beside Lake Mille Lacs (aka Misi-zaaga'iganiing per the Ojibwe and M’deWakan or B’de Wakan – lake of the great Spirit – per the Dakotah, names given by native peoples who continue to live or have once lived beside these waters) as dwellers upon, companions with and stewards of several precious acres of protected woods and wetlands which provide home to many species of God’s children.