

**Sermon: "Gratitude" Text: Joel 2:23-27 & Mathew 6: 25-34 Thanksgiving Sunday
October 10, 2021 Rev Steve Clifton Rideau Park United Church, Ottawa ON**

Perhaps one of the benefits of COVID time has been the opportunity to reconnect with the natural world. When we could not do other things, we at least could go outside. Walking, hiking, biking...all these past times have been granted greater presence in our lives.

Bicycles are back ordered and hard to find. Walking paths are more populated. City streets here in Ottawa are closed to cars to allow for pedestrians and cyclists.

And if we are more in nature, nature is more with us too. Whales swim in the ports of Montreal and New York. Coyotes and wild turkeys now can be found in my suburban neighborhood.

Perhaps we city dwellers now live a bit closer to nature and nature closer to us...

The people of ancient Palestine, in the time of Jesus would have lived very close to the land. When our congregation's pilgrimage group visited Galilee, we stood on the northern slopes of the Galilean Sea. We stood in the place where tradition says that Jesus spoke the words that we shared today. Matthew 6 is part of the Sermon on the Mount. This location is just up the hill from Capernaum and the seashore. The land is fertile. Crops were growing. The sun was shining, reflecting off the blue water not far below.

A few centuries before Jesus we hear the prophet Joel rejoicing as years of hunger come to an end. He writes: "God sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before. The threshing floors will be filled with grain; the vats will overflow with new wine and oil." The people in the time of Joel and in Jesus' day too, knew that they were completely dependent on seed and soil, on rainfall and sunshine. Without the land and its fruits, they would not survive.

Still, even to them, even to people who lived close to the land, Jesus says: consider.... consider the lilies of the field, consider the birds of the air. Consider the natural world around you – Creation and its wonder- and considering all of this – consider then how God provides. If the people who gathered on the Galilean hillsides needed to be prompted into paying attention, how much more do we...

"Consider..." says Jesus. Consider ...

Consider lilies: these blooms that decked the Galilean hills with color in their season, they are beautiful without effort, more splendidly arrayed than the greatest king...Consider the beauty of sedums and Brown Eyed Susan's and all the flowers that bloom in our part of the world into fall. Consider the vibrant colours of autumn forests, of fall's golden fields...

Consider the birds of the air: they are provided for; they have no worries about tomorrow.... Hear the sounds of geese flying in formation above...

Consider the people in your life: the gift that they are...

Consider the food that is part of the celebration of Thanksgiving and where it comes from. Not ultimately from a store. It is all the fruit of the earth, the product of farm and field, seed and soil, water, and warmth.

Consider... the great Saints and mystics who have gone before us, who themselves considered God's creation and saw something there.

Think of Francis of Assisi who called the sun and moon his brother and sister, who preached to birds and befriended a wolf; in his contemplation of Creation, Francis sometimes saw the world as hanging upside down. All the world was inverted and all of Creation, trees, and mountains and all that we make, our homes and cities, animals and people hung in the air but did not fall, kept safe by the grace of the Creator of all.

Meister Eckhart the great 13thC German mystic wrote: *Apprehend God in all things, for God is in all things. Every single creature is full of God and is a book about God. If I spent enough time with the tiniest creature –even a caterpillar –I would never have to prepare another sermon, so full of God is every creature.*

Consider what our ancient agrarian ancestors could not: the scientific wonder that is our improbable life here on this tiny planet, in our corner of a vast and wondrous universe.

- We are 93 million miles from the sun. Move us closer to the sun or farther away by a few 100,000 miles and our earth would be a lifeless sphere.
- Our planet has an atmosphere that is 21% oxygen. Make it 23% oxygen and none of us would be here. Go down to an atmosphere of 19% oxygen and there is no life on earth.
- Our oceans are 3.4% salt, the same degree of salination as our blood. Increase ocean salination to 4% or take it down to 2% and there is no life on earth.

All of this is part of what is called the “science of fine tuning.” * There are hundreds of precise numbers that together add up to life on earth. If any one of these measurements shifts significantly - gravitational pull, density of minerals, carbon levels- life as we know it is gone from the earth. Consider how our being here is a miracle. A wonder.

Consider this. A few weeks back Amazon founder Jeff Bezos shot up into orbit in his personal rocket ship Blue Origin and the media was filled with news of this 11-minute adventure.

While quietly below the tumult, a seed sits in the darkness of earth, pushing its roots down into moist soil, thrusting it shoots up towards the sun, and no crowds gather to cheer it on. It's a miracle that no one notices. We do depend on this miracle and others like it to live.

Consider that considering all this can create gratitude and that can increase your happiness and well-being. Consider the pro-social effects of gratitude; married couples who thank each other more often have happier marriages, and thanking friends or acquaintances makes them see you as a warmer person.

Consider the birds, the lilies, autumn forests alive with vibrant colour. Consider the fruits of the good earth. Consider the gifts you have all around you. Consider the gifts and consider the Giver. And consider giving thanks to God, the source of all good things.

Amen

*The "Science of fine tuning" data is drawn from a presentation by Rob Bell in his video *Everything is Spiritual* http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2rklwkm_dQ