

2021 10 10 – Lessons from the Land

Matthew 6:25-33 (The Inclusive Bible)

Jesus said, “Look at the birds in the sky... Learn a lesson from the way the wildflowers grow.” Jesus is sitting on a mountainside, talking to his disciples, sharing his deep wisdom with his followers. His advice is to learn from the birds, the plants, the animals, the land itself. This particular lesson happens to be about faith and trust in God’s providence. He is telling his followers that God feeds the birds and clothes the flowers. He explains that if God so cares for tiny birds and short-lived grass, then the Holy Mystery must love and care for humankind too. The Creator provides food for us to eat and clothing for us to wear. Jesus wisely tells his followers that worrying won’t bring food for tomorrow or clothing for winter

I agree that worrying doesn’t help, but I like to think that if I were on that mountainside with Jesus, I might have spoken up and said, “What about the squirrel, who gather nuts in the fall and stores what he needs for the winter, or the bear who eats huge amounts of fish and berries and honey so that she is good and fat before her long winter sleep. Yes, faith and trust are important, but so is taking care of ourselves and preparing for what we know will be a long winter season. We do need to make sure we have clothes to keep us warm, food to fill our stomachs and shelter from the snow and the wind.”

I expect that Jesus would have graciously responded by saying, “Of course, using the gifts of creation and understanding the changing seasons, is important.

When we see what is around us and learn from it, then it is possible to both live in the moment and be ready for what is to come.” Jesus was teaching his disciples that they needed to be aware of the land in which they lived. They needed to understand the cycles of creation, the plants, the animals, the birds, the sky, the sea and the land. There are so many lessons that we can learn from God’s creation, from the land, from the place in which we reside.

This week I googled the words, “lessons from the land,” just see what would show up. I wanted to understand what that term meant in today’s world. And what appeared were all kinds of websites talking about the Indigenous peoples of this land and how their learning has always been land-based.

On the University of Saskatchewan website I found the following words:

The importance of land, of place, of belonging to a certain locality is of paramount importance when it comes to understanding and appreciating Indigenous worldview and culture. First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples are intimately connected to the land, as are many Indigenous peoples around the world. Being able to survive and thrive as humans, as families and as communities depended on a deep and thorough knowledge of the land, the waters, the animals and the plants; the surrounding environment in its totality. When one has grown up in a harsh and sometimes hostile environment, there is an ingrained respect for the land, the weather and the animals that inhabit the same space.

https://teaching.usask.ca/curriculum/indigenous_voices/place-and-culture/introduction.php

For our Indigenous neighbours, the land, Mother Earth, is their teacher and provider, just as their parents and elders are teachers and providers. They have learned to observe the ways of nature and to appreciate all the gifts that it offers.

Most of us are not Indigenous to this land, but we still have the ability to learn its lessons. I invite you now to think of some of the lessons that you have learned from the birds, the flowers, the grass, the sky, the earth itself. What have you learned? What has creation taught you? (leave time for people to respond) Here are some possible answers:

1. from the leaves on the trees – none of them are perfect.- but they are beautiful
2. From the falling leaves – nothing is permanent
3. From the rising sun – tomorrow will come
4. From the sunset – there is beauty in endings
5. From the grass – the importance of bending in the wind
6. From the birds – an appreciation for colour and beauty – even in the little brown birds
7. From the flowers - take time to smell the roses)

I want to share with you a story that I found in a book called “Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teaching of Plants” by Robin Wall Kimmerer. It is a story from the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, a story about the corn harvest.

[This is] a story of the years when the corn harvests were so plentiful that the caches were full. The fields had been so generous with the villagers that the people scarcely needed to work. So they didn't. Hoes leaned against a tree, idle. The people became so lazy that they let the time for corn ceremonies go by without a single song of gratitude. They began to use the corn in ways the Three Sisters had not intended when they gave the people corn as a sacred gift of food. They burned it for fuel when they couldn't be bothered to cut firewood. The dogs dragged it off from the untidy heaps the people made instead of storing the harvest in secure granaries. No one stopped the kids when they kicked ears around the village in their games.

Saddened by the lack of respect, the Corn Spirit decided to leave, to go where she would be appreciated. At first the people didn't even notice. But the next year, the corn fields were nothing but weeds. The caches were nearly empty and the grain that had been left untended was moldy and mouse-chewed. There was nothing to eat. The people sat about in despair, growing thinner and thinner. When they abandoned gratitude, the gifts abandoned them.

One small child walked out from the village and wandered for hungry days until he found the Corn Spirit in a sunlit clearing in the woods. He begged her to return to his people. She smiled kindly at him and instructed him to teach his people the gratitude and respect that they had forgotten. Only then would she return. He did as she asked and after a hard winter

without corn, to remind them of the cost, she returned to them in the spring. (*Braiding Sweetgrass*, pages 187-188)

Jesus told his disciples, “Seek first God’s reign, and God’s justice, and all these things will be given to you besides.” God’s reign is living with respect in creation, it is caring for the gifts that we have been given, it is sharing what we have with those in need and it is giving thanks for all that God’s creation has provided. These are all lessons we can learn from the land.

May it be so. Amen.