

20.05.03

## SERMON:

On Friday I took an early morning walk into town stopping and reading signs on windows, I learned how Cozy Thai Restaurant is managing take out and delivery, I learned how to safely place an order through Appalachian Outdoor Store, I learned that Freeze and Thaw Cycles, where I usually get my bike fixed, is totally closed and welcomes donations to help pay its employees. Outside the library, under their expansive overhang, 2 people were sleeping - their belongings, a half eaten piece of pizza and a 2 liter bottle of orange drink just within reach of their sleeping bags.

I continued up onto campus, noticing the beauty - orange striped tulips, pink dogwoods unfurling, a robin sitting on her nest, protectively warming her eggs.

So much beauty and so much heartache, all right here. It's easy for me to miss - just a mile from my home, as I rarely venture into town these days.

Our scriptures this morning were chosen to match our theme "All life is interconnected". All life is valuable. All life will teach us, if we just pay attention.

How did Job put it in our reading today? "Ask the animals, and they will teach you, or speak to the earth, and it will teach you... Which of all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this?"

Our work is to learn, to listen, to remember that we are but one part of God's abundant, glorious world. We are called to honor all of creation and to learn from the plants, the animals, yes, they have much to teach us.

We so quickly forget that everything, every thing, is interconnected.

COVID has been a stark reminder of that. What's happening in China matters to us here in Centre County. The cancellation of graduation weekend here at Penn State impacts the daily lives of garment workers in Bangladesh who make the T-shirts our local stores hoped to sell. The Bangladeshis are now also unemployed, struggling even harder just to afford the rice they'll eat tonight.

Yes, every thing here on planet earth is interconnected. Somehow, the Lord God made all and cares for all - even the birds of the air which do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet our heavenly Father feeds them.

As I considered interconnection as the theme for this Creation Care Sunday, I found myself returning to one of my favorite teachers - trees. Scientists continue to learn more and more about the complex ways trees support one another through huge, complex underground fungal connections. Trees are a symbol for interconnectedness.

The biggest, oldest trees in the forest, sometimes called mother trees because of the nurturing, supportive role they provide, have the most

fungal connections. With their deep roots, they're able to draw up water and make it available to shallow-rooted seedlings who might otherwise die in times of stress. In times of crisis, when their neighbors are struggling, mother trees detect their distress signals through their fungal connections, and increase the flow of nutrients towards them.

Why do trees share resources and form alliances instead of competing? Forest ecologist, Suzanne Simard says "Actually, it doesn't make evolutionary sense for trees to behave like resource-grabbing individualists...They live longest and reproduce most often in a healthy stable forest. That's why they've evolved to help their neighbors."<sup>1</sup>

Yes, the trees have much to teach us. Trees evolving to help their neighbors. Do you hear an echo of Jesus' words - To love the Lord your God with all your being, and to love your neighbor as yourself.

Trees also communicate through the air, using scent signals... On the hot, dusty savannas of sub-Saharan Africa, the wide-crowned umbrella thorn acacia is a favorite food source for giraffes. When a giraffe starts chewing acacia leaves, the tree notices the injury and emits a distress signal in the form of ethylene gas. Upon detecting this gas, neighboring acacias start pumping tannins into their leaves, making them toxic. Giraffes are aware of this, having evolved with acacias, and so they often walk 100 yards—farther than ethylene gas typically travels—before feeding on the next

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/the-whispering-trees-180968084/>

acacia. The damage done is spread out. Giraffes, you might say, know that the trees are talking to one another, and find sustainable ways to live together. They are interconnected.

It's us humans who so easily forget that all of life is intricately woven together. That passage Micah read from the prophet Hosea spoke of how God's people had become disconnected. Disconnected from God, disconnected from one another, and therefore all of creation suffered.

The people forgot that all life is interconnected.

Our faith in Christ challenges us to not lose sight of how we are all connected. Looking to the natural world might teach us about sharing with those around us, not to behave like resource-grabbing individualists but as part of this magnificent web of life, where we help our neighbors.

**Interconnected, faith-filled living is less about finding ways to support the life we want and more about creating a life that sustains what everyone and everything needs.**

What does this look like for us?

I read this week about folks who consider themselves privileged right now - having stable jobs - who are choosing to invest their stimulus checks back into their local economies, donating their checks to local not for profit organizations, supporting fundraisers for people facing crises, generously tipping delivery persons.

Maybe you need that stimulus check to make ends meet right now. Interconnected faith-filled living might mean taking the time to help plant trees in your local watershed,

It might mean calling a friend, just to check in, or emailing your neighbor to make sure they're OK.

Interconnected faith-filled living might simply be stopping, taking a full breath, and whispering a prayer of gratitude - naming 3 things, 3 simple, ordinary things you're grateful for right now.

“Lord of all to thee we raise, this our hymn of grateful praise”.  
Brothers and sisters, siblings in Christ: All life is interconnected. All life is valuable. All life will teach us, if we will just pay attention. Our work is to learn, to listen, to care for all of God's creation.