

Karen Hollis | Sept 20, 2020 | Exodus 16:9-15 | Proverbs 8:1-3, 14-31

Season of Creation 2: Wisdom

Sermon Title: Presence

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us today, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen

We were watching a nature show last year sometime that showed footage of a little desert lizard that would do a handstand and hold it, motionless for an hour or more. They explained that moisture would accumulate like dew on its body at the edges of the day, which was enough to sustain it in the harsh environment. That little guy and all his ancestors before him had figured out how the world works in that place, and to access resources enough to live. Moving to a new place isn't necessarily an option, so it is important to learn how to be sustainable. Wisdom lives there in the folds of creation and knows about the balance of life, not only how to sustain a lizard in the desert, but how the lizard fits into the whole.

It's one thing for a lizard to be resourceful in the desert, but it's another thing entirely for humans to suddenly find themselves in the middle of a desert wilderness because being there is better than where they came from. Having left Egypt, not only are the Israelites away from the familiar, such as it was, they have no idea how to survive where they are. Hunger is really powerful – it puts our lizard brains in control and we can forget how to think clearly. In their hunger, the Israelites start asking, was it a mistake to leave? Would we be better off living under Pharaoh's rule, at least there we had enough to eat . . . perhaps it is better than starving in the desert. Worried about the future and conflicted about the past, Moses cries out to God, who says, 'If you listen carefully to me and follow my commandments, I will care for you, for I am the Lord who heals you.' I wonder about God's request for obedience . . . from that brittle place of survival, one might think God is exerting power and asking for blind following. What if God instead is trying to teach them how to see . . . to allow the past and the future to fade to the background and to bring forward the present. In the present, they can exercise their skills of observation and awaken to wisdom, who lives in the here and now. What if there isn't a separation between obedience to God and learning to be in balance with Creation?

One wouldn't ordinarily look to the morning dew for sustenance . . . perhaps for stillness and magic, but not sustenance. God invites them to look closer . . . see how what looks like a little can become a lot. You'd miss it if you weren't looking, but we're in the wilderness now, and the word of wisdom is again observation. Listen, notice . . . when we learn what she has to teach when we honour what God created, we come into alignment with the dynamic and balanced system of God's creation. What we call conventional wisdom probably wouldn't agree with this perspective or find value in careful observation . . . but then conventional wisdom is not born out of vulnerability, out of places on the margins, places where a flaky substance on the ground in a thin layer like frost could mean the difference between life and death.

With the quail and manna, God brings the people out of their fears and invites them into the present, with what is happening right now. There are a lot of things in the world that take time, thought and planning to address, and the Israelites will get to those . . . but right now, they gather food and feed their bellies and learn about this wilderness.

During this time in our own lives, covid, hurricanes, fires, perhaps like me, you've had some more time for observation. I've particularly been noticing how when I plant melons and squash in the garden, I am also creating habitat for benign, beneficial, as well as harmful creatures. I've noticed that rain starts to come back mid-September when the last of my tomatoes are ripening – it happened last year too – so I watch and listen for the right time to pick them. Several eagles live in the area around Namaste farm, where we garden. Have you ever noticed that they too observe nature? Have you ever noticed an eagle watching the sunset? Watching for prey, or just watching? In these upsetting times, I find unending measures of peace observing nature . . . perhaps even nature is teaching how to be present and observe.

What about you, what are you noticing in the present? What do you see when you observe the world around you? How will it continue to serve us as learning from our changing environment becomes more and more essential? Like the Israelites in the desert wilderness, there are always gifts for us in the present.

Where the Breath Begins by Jan Richardson

Dry

and dry

and dry

in each direction.

Dust dry.

Desert dry.

Bone dry.

And here

in your own heart:

dry,

the center of your chest

a bare valley

stretching out

every way you turn.

Did you think

this was where

you had come to die?

It's true that

you may need

to do some crumbling,

yes.

That some things

you have protected

may want to be

laid bare,

yes.

That you will be asked

to let go

and let go,

yes.

But listen.

This is what

a desert is for.

If you have come here

desolate,

if you have come here

deflated,

then thank your lucky stars

the desert is where

you have landed—

here where it is hard
to hide,
here where it is unwise
to rely on your own devices,
here where you will
have to look
and look again
and look close
to find what refreshment waits
to reveal itself to you.

I tell you,
though it may be hard
to see it now,
this is where
your greatest blessing
will find you.

I tell you,
this is where
you will receive
your life again.

I tell you,
this is where
the breath begins.

And so we are called to see, to watch, to observe, that the blessing of life may also find us there. Thanks be to God.

