

Karen Hollis | September 11, 2022
14th Sunday after Pentecost – Season of Creation, Gratitude

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b (Lynn C. Bauman)

O Lord, my God, behind your work,
your wisdom is the architect of all.
The plenitude of life is yours.
I turn and look and see the sea aglint,
so full of life and overflowing,
Through which our ships of commerce move,
but deeper still those mighty ships of yours,
Your whales, your secret creatures of the deep,
your joy, your sport, your praise.
And everything that lives and moves on land or sea
or air turns eyes to look at you
the source of everything.
Alone, you give it all as gift,
you feed a world made hungry by your hand.
You give and give, we gather in.
Your arms you open even wider still,
And we are filled to overflowing
with generosity of every kind.
If you for one small moment would ever hide your face from us,
all creation would shrink in terror and in fear.
If you even briefly held your breath
we would die and pass to dust.
You breathe and we spring forth to life,
your breath and beauty fills the face of earth.
So may this beauty and the glory that is you and yours remain,
and may all that you have done bring highest joy.
For in your presence we are made to tremble out of awe and fear,
and we are set aflame by your bright burning blaze.
So while I live and have my breath,
all this shall be my song,
And may the poetry of heart and word I speak
rise up as joy to bless the Lord,
For we would ever bless you, God,
our hearts remembering all you are to us,
Both now and ever more . . . Amen and Hallelujah!

Where in your life do you connect with gratitude? I always go right away to Thanksgiving – gathering with loved ones and sharing around the table the things we’re thankful for. I saw a humpback at Orlebar a few nights ago. She was hanging out to the right of the lighthouse – I saw her dive and flip her tail in the air. I glanced to the left and the sky was aglow with colours of the sunset. I didn’t know which way to look . . . I felt so honoured to be there. I think also of late summer gardens that are still offering food . . . the kindness of friends and strangers . . . a win for social justice . . . or ease of discomfort in one’s body.

Another memory comes to mind . . . I was at an Anglican clergy gathering pre-COVID where the Metis facilitator invited us to introduce ourselves around the circle in the context of our relationships. With tears in their eyes, people shared about their families, their ancestors, pieces of their identity that come from a particular place. I was nervous to share – I felt moved and a little overwhelmed by the invitation to share in such a vulnerable way. When my turn came, I heard myself say, “I’m daughter to Malcolm and Nancy, granddaughter to Bea, Jim, Anne & Robbie. My ancestors are indigenous to Eastern and Western Europe, the UK, and North

America. I have moved many times in my life, but I have always lived on the Salish Sea and I feel deeply connected to this place. My grandma Bea had a fire inside of her . . . I have that same fire inside of me.” Even when I say those words now, love and gratitude are like waves that wash through me. And through that gratitude, I can see myself in terms of those relationships and how essential they are to my work in the world. I would be a terrified and isolated shell of myself if it wasn’t for my family and this body of water keeps me close to my roots, even in a different country.

In South Africa there is a word Ubuntu, which builds on this idea of identity through relationship. I learned Ubuntu as “I am because we are.” When Nelson Mandela was president, he described it as “the profound sense that we are human only through the humanity of others; that if we are to accomplish anything in this world, it will in equal measure be due to the work and achievements of others”.¹ Ubuntu is the opposite of isolation. It affirms our interconnectedness. If we feel alone, we need only expand our view to see our supporters, allies, or willing collaborators. In this global

community, the contributions of someone on the other side of the world can help sustain our ongoing work here or offer a seed of possibility. Identifying the contributions of those who came before us and those who walk beside us can feel like a relief . . . it’s a big burden to feel like we’re carrying things on our own . . . we’re not made for that. We’re made for Ubuntu and looking through that lens is a gateway to gratitude.

Mandela’s words also speak to those relationships that support us along the way . . . the role models, mentors, colleagues, friends, family . . . we are because of all these people. I invite you to take a moment now and remember the people who have helped you become the person you are, and have supported you in making your contributions to the world . . . let’s take a few moments of reflection (10 seconds) . . . it’s so moving to remember.

Robin Wall Kimmerer invites us to expand even further our understanding of our interconnectedness. If we imagine seeing the earth from space, it is contained in the glowing blue orb. Every aspect of creating, sustaining and renewing life is found here; every promise has potential here

¹ Nelson Mandela in preface to *Mandela’s Way: Fifteen Lessons on Life, Love, and Courage*

and every necessity can be met. This is why we sometimes refer to the earth as our mother, because she provides everything that is needed for life.

When we shared in the Words that Come Before All Else to open our worship service and gave thanks for every aspect of creation and their gifts for the whole, how did you feel? Was it a warm feeling or cool feeling? Did you feel connected? Did you feel wealthy? Did you feel awe or wonder? Comforted by the abundance of resources or an ache at the human impact on the gifts of the earth? Hearing about the responsibilities of for instance, the water and plants, did you wonder about your own responsibility to the whole? We are indeed part of this vast web of connection – we are not alone, as A New Creed proclaims, we live in God’s world . . . and God our Creator is at the center of the web.

Lynn Baumann’s translation of this morning’s psalm is exquisite. “O Lord, my God, behind your work, your wisdom is the architect of all. And everything that lives and moves on land or sea or air turns eyes to look at you the source of everything.” Each from our place in creation’s web, we look to the centre, to the source of all . . . like the sunset I shared with an eagle at Twin Beaches – each of us gazing into the mystery that opens at the edges

of the day. Each of us looking toward the holy, each of us with a role to play in the whole.

Before reading Kimmerer’s book, I didn’t bring together gratitude with our interconnectedness in a concrete way. I certainly connected gratitude with family . . . but I never unpacked it and named it. Understanding myself in terms of all my relations: family, friends, mentors, community, animals, plants, water, moon . . . I feel not only grateful to be a part of it – I mean, it was this gift that was here all along – I feel more grounded and centered in myself because I’m aware of that web of belonging. I encourage you to spend some time reflecting on the web of belonging for yourself and see what gifts are present for you there.