“I Never Thought I Could”

Happy Thursday Everyone,

*As I open this reflection, I want to apologize to those of you who might look forward to reading these reflections on Wednesday that this reflection didn’t get posted yesterday. Sometimes there simply aren’t enough hours in the day when schedules get full. So, thank you for giving me the grace that this midweek reflection is a day late.*

“It’s the most wonderful time of the year…” How many of you are singing along already? Though I’m not saying that in anticipation of Christmas (even if there are already Christmas decorations out in many stores). No, I’m saying “it’s the most wonderful time of the year” because it’s officially deer season!

If you’re not into the whole hunting thing, you might be rolling your eyes at me right now, and that’s ok, I’m not hating. But oh, how I love these fall months! The air gets cooler, and leaves put on a parade of color before falling to the earth to become compost for next spring’s new growth.

Around this time, I take intentional time to go through what feels almost like a ritualistic practice of preparing all of my clothing, supplies, and tools for my adventures into the woods. I find myself listening and relistening to episodes of one of my favorite podcasts, *“The Reverend Hunter Podcast”* hosted by Pastor & Professor, Tony Jones. The truth is though this time of year isn’t “wonderful” simply because a hunting season is “in.” What makes this time of year wonderful is the opportunity to stop and be from the fast pace demands of life, to share community with friends and fellow hunters, to enjoy the fullness of God’s creation, and to interact with that creation is sacred space.

Those moments of walking in the darkness of early hours of the morning to find a seat in a tree and to sit in silence and wake up with the world…ahhh, those are holy moments. To sit and observe the trees and the wind as they dance with each other. To watch the squirrels dance across the forest floor looking for a neighbor to play with or a morning snack. To contemplate life, to talk with God, to sit and simply to be: no noise of traffic, no phones ringing, just me and the residents of mother nature…it’s a connection to God and God’s created order that the daily grind just doesn’t provide.

Are you wondering what’s my point for sharing my feelings of fulfillment that I find in the adventures of hunting and being outdoors? I share it because the love and sacred connection that I have found in the act of hunting has inspired me to do something I never thought I could do…I’m in the early stages of writing a book! Honestly, at this point it looks like journaling and mapping what I’d like to explore in this writing.

The truth is; however, I never thought I could write a book. To say that I’m doing this is a statement coming from the same guy who has never been a big reader. Thank God for audiobooks! My ADHD just won’t allow my mind to stay focused on reading line after line of words on a page. Yet, here I am, starting the process of doing something I never thought I could do.

And here’s my question to you…what is it in life that captivates you in the same way that participating in the activities of deer hunting and being outdoors captivates me? We all have that “something” in life that we find enthralling. We all have that hobby, activity, experience in life that doing it or participating in it gives us a sense of fulfillment and joy. It gives us a special (one might even say sacred) sense of belonging and purpose. That’s a deep question but I really invite you to think about what is that “something” that you find fulfilling to your innermost self?

Now let’s go one step further…what’s that “thing” for Bethlehem Lutheran Church? Or if you are someone reading this, and not connected to the daily ministry of Bethlehem, what is that “thing” that your faith community participates in that gives a sense of fulfillment and joy.

Though I haven’t been on one of these trips yet, I know that Bethlehem’s ministry of providing clean water through “Living Waters for the World” is one of those deeply fulfilling ministries. Is there something else? Another ministry? Through the DNA of this congregation, what is God up to that creates a spirit of sacred belonging and purpose?

One of my favorite excerpts of the Apostle Paul’s writings is where he talks about the church being connected in community and in call as the body of Christ. In fact, a pastor friend of mine often says to me, “that [Paul’s body of Christ text] is something you talk about often…that’s big to you whether you realize it or not.” And they’re right. That is big to me. It’s also fascinating what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12 after he acknowledges the unity of the church as the body of Christ.

Paul writes, “**28**In the church, God has appointed first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, the ability to help others, leadership skills, different kinds of tongues. **29**All aren’t apostles, are they? All aren’t prophets, are they? All aren’t teachers, are they? All don’t perform miracles, do they? **30**All don’t have gifts of healing, do they? All don’t speak in different tongues, do they? All don’t interpret, do they? **31**Use your ambition to try to get the greater gifts. And I’m going to show you an even better way.” Part of what I think Paul is getting at here is affirming the question that I had previously asked. I think Paul in a way says, “the church and all the members of it have that “something” that is fulfilling, even sacred to participate in.” Whether that’s teaching, healing, providing clean water, feeding the hungry, or even finding God in the outdoors, God has gifted all God’s people with “something” that gives them joy to experience and participate in God’s wonderful work in the world.

So, what’s your “thing” that gives you a sense of fulfillment and where you can experience God? And once you’ve tapped into what your “thing” is, what is God equipping you to do that you never thought you could do? If you’ve never taken time to think about that question, I invite you to find some space to be at peace with only you and God, and then I dare you to do some dreaming.

The Peace of Christ be with y’all,

Pastor Vern