

6/13/21

AS I THINK MOST OF YOU KNOW, WE FOLLOW THE LECTIONARY— BIBLE READINGS FOR EACH SUNDAY. THESE VERSES ARE OF PROTESTANTS AND CATHOLICS. SUGGESTED BY A GROUP—I'M NOT SURE WHO MAKES IT UP- SO ALL GATHERED CHURCHES THIS MORNING ARE READING THE SAME PASSAGES FROM THE BIBLE THAT WE ARE. OUR AGREEMENT AMONG PEOPLE WHO ARE SPEAKING IS THAT WE CAN CREATE OUR MESSAGE AROUND THE SUGGESTED BIBLE PASAGES, BUT WE ARE NOT REQUIRED TO.

THE OLD TESTAMENT READING TODAY IS THE STORY OF DAVID BEING CHOSEN TO BE THE KING OF THE ISRAELITES AFTER ALL HIS BROTHERS WERE REJECTED. THE STORY OF DAVID LENDS ITSELF TO MANY THOUGHTS AND SUBJECTS TO TALK ABOUT. HE WAS A LIVELY, FLAWED AND FASCINATING CHARACTER. WE WILL HEAR HIS STORY IN THE COMING WEEKS. BUT I AM NOT GOING TO TALK ABOUT DAVID TODAY.

INSTEAD, I WILL REFER TO THE VERSES FROM EZEKIEL AND PSALM 92, WHICH I WILL INCORPORATE IN MY TALK.

I THOUGHT ABOUT MARY'S TALK LAST SUNDAY AND HOW MUCH I ADMIRERED THE WAY SHE TOOK A VERY DIFFICULT PASSAGE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ABOUT JESUS AND TURNED IT INTO A POSITIVE LESSON.

THE ADMONITION TO LEAVE ONE'S FAMILY – ONE'S MOTHER, , SISTERS AND BROTHERS AND FOLLOW CHRIST WAS THE CORE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT READING LAST WEEK. MARY 'SOFTENED' HOW HARSH THIS SOUNDS BY SUGGESTING THAT ONE MUST LEAVE ONE'S FAMILY AND GROW OUT INTO A LARGER COMMUNITY.

MARY USED THIS STORY TO SHOW HOW THE SMALL COMMUNITY OF FAMILY CAN BE EXPANDED TO THE GREATER COMMUNITY AROUND US—FIRST OUR NEIGHBORS, THEN PEOPLE WHO SHARE OUR INTERESTS, AND THEN BROADER TO PEOPLE-TEACHERS, POLITICIANS, CORPORATE LEADERS, INTO AN ALMOST UNIVERSAL COMMUNITY. MARY COMPARED THAT LARGER COMMUNITY TO THE COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS IN JESUS AS THE SON OF GOD.

I WILL BUILD MY TALK ON THIS CONCEPT. WILL NOT LIMIT THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY TO BELIEVERS IN JESUS, BUT TALK ABOUT HOW WE CAN, AND SHOULD, EXPAND OUR COMMUNITY BEYOND FAMILY.

ONE'S FIRST SENSE OF COMMUNITY IS THAT OF THE FAMILY. FAMILIES CAN BE A SOURCE OF COMFORT AND JOY BUT ALSO CAN BE WROUGHT WITH TROUBLES AND INTRIGUE, --- THINK OF THE CLASSIC DRAMAS THAT HAVE BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT FAMILIES AND THE JEALOUSY, COMPETITION, ANGER, ACUSATION ---, BUT ONE IS STILL A PART OF THAT FAMILY.

IN SOME WAYS, THE COMMUNITY HERE **IS** LIKE FAMILY—WE DON'T NECESSARILY CHOOSE OUR NEIGHBORS, BUT, LIKE FAMILY, THEY ARE HERE. WE ALL ADJUST TO WAYS WE SPEND TIME TOGETHER. OUR CHURCH IS A VITAL PART OF OUR COMMUNITY AND CONTINUITY. FRED BANKS WAS BAPTISED HERE 80 YEARS AGO—BAPTISED WITH BEAVERKILL RIVER WATER. AND NOW HIS DAUGHTER JOSIE IS HEAD OF THE CEMETARY ASSOCIATION. CHURCH HISTORY GOES BACK TO TOM AND ---- DAVIDSON, WHO GAVE THE LAND AND ESTABLISHED THE METHODIST CHURCH. IT IS COMMUNITY NOW BECAUSE WE BOUGHT THE CHURCH TOGETHER. IT IS INCLUSIVE, WELCOMING PEOPLE OF VARIOUS FAITHS AND THOSE ON SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS.

EVERY SUNDAY WE SHARE OUR JOYS AND CONCERNS, LEARNING ABOUT HOW OUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS ARE DOING. THIS SHARING BRINGS US TOGETHER,

Sally Cerny commenting on how nice it was to hear Violet talk last Sunday about graduation and starting middle school –it gave her a sense of family, community.

I REFERRED TO THE WATER FROM THE BEAVERKILL BEING USED FOR FRED’S BAPTISM. WE USED BEAVERKILL WATER FOR ALL THREE OF OUR CHILDRENS’ BAPTISMS HERE IN THIS CHURCH. IN THIS WAY AND SO MANY OTHERS, WE ARE TIED TO THE RIVER THAT FLOWS THROUGH OUR VALLEY.

THE RIVER JOINS US TOGETHER. IN A BOOK I’M READING—ABOUT THE POWER AND MYSTERY OF NATURE, “BRAIDING SWEETGRASS” BY ROBIN WALL KIMMERER, THE AUTHOR WRITES

“I ONCE HEARD A CHIEF OF AN ARTIC VILLAGE IN NORTHEASTEN ALASKA—INTRODUCE HIMSELF SIMPLY AS A ‘A BOY WHO WAS RAISED BY A RIVER. “ A DESCRIPTION AS SMOOTH AND SLIPPERY AS A RIVER ROCK. DID HE MEAN ONLY THAT HE GREW UP NEAR ITS BANKS? OR WAS THE RIVER RESPONSIBLE FOR REARING HIM, FOR TEACHING HIM THE THINGS HE NEEDED TO LIVE? DID IT FEED HIM, BODY AND SOUL? RAISED BY A RIVER” I SUPPOSE BOTH MEANINGS ARE TRUE—YOU CAN HARDLY HAVE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER,”

LET’S THINK ABOUT THE IMORTANCE OF OUR BEAVERKILL RIVER. YOU DON’T HAVE TO BE A FISHERMAN, OR EVEN SWIM UNDER THE COVERED BRIDGE, TO FEEL A CONNECTION TO THE RIVER. I WAS ONCE ASKED WHAT BODY OF WATER DID I PREFER AND I IMMEDIATELY SAID—A CREEK, BECAUSE GROWING UP IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA, WE HAD NO NATURAL LAKES—SWIMMING WAS IN THE ASHEVILLE REC PARK SWIMMING POOL. THE RIVERS WERE MUDDY—AS MOST IN THE SOUTH ARE. BUT HIGH CREEKS AND STREAMS WERE JUST RIGHT FOR CHILD’S

PLAY—BUILDING DAMS AND TRYING TO MAKE A LITTLE SWIMMING HOLE—WITH NO LUCK BUT HOURS WERE SPENT IN THE CREEK TRYING.

THE SIZE OF THE BEAVERKILL IS JUST RIGHT. THE GENTLENESS AND THE BEAUTY ARE THERE EVERY DAY. IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE ON A LOVELY MORNING LIKE THIS WALKING ALONG THE RIVER THAT IT CAN BE SO POWERFUL THAT IT CAN SWEEP AWAY MASSIVE TREES AND EVEN HOMES.

THE RIVER IS HOME NOT ONLY TO TROUT, AND FROGS, AND MAY FLIES AND CADDIS, BUT ALSO EAGLES, WHICH WE SEE BY THE ROCK CUT AND ABOVE THE CAMPSITE, MINK, EELS, FISHERS, DUCKS AND JOHN SAW OTTERS BU THE BRIDGE A FEW YEARS AGO. IT HAS SO MUCH LIFE – AND THIS RIVER LIFE SUSTAINS US ALL., DON'T WE SING 'SHALL WE GATHER AT THE RIVER' AS OUR FIRST HYMN EVERY SEASON. SO WE HAVE A 'RIVER COMMUNITY'.

THERE IS A QUOTE THAT IS ATTRIBUTED TO HERICLITUS ALTHOUGH I'VE ALSO HEARD IT ATTRIBUTED TO THE BUDHA. WHICHEVER, IT IS A THOUGHT ABOUT LIFE TO PONDER.

"NO MAN STEPS INTO THE SAME RIVER TWICE, FOR IT'S NOT THE SAME RIVER AND HE'S NOT THE SAME MAN."

PART OF THE RIVER SYSTEM ARE THE VARIOUS LAKES AND PONDS IN OUR VALLEY. YOU ALL HAVE SEEN OUR POND , WHICH I LIKE TO CALL A GIFT OF NATURE --- WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM THE TOWN HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT WHO RAISED THE DRAINAGE DITCH BACK IN THE FIFTIES. WE HAVE A PICTURE OF THAT PART OF THE PROPERTY WHICH WAS A CORN FIELD 100 YEARS AGO. THEN BEAVERS DAMED IT UP A BIT AND THE WATER STAYED. THERE WERE TREES STANDING, WHICH FINALLY ROTTEN AND FELL. WE NEVER SWAM IN THE POND—BOTTOM IS

TOO MUDDY, BUT WE'VE BEEN ICE SKATING THERE FOR YEARS – THANKS NOW PRIMARILY TO DUKE AND WOODS WISER WHO CVLEAN IT OFF. A MAN WHO BOUGHT PROPERTY IN BERRY BROOK SAID HE BOUGHT HIS HOUSE WHEN HE SAW THE SKATERS THERE AT NIGHT UNDER THE FLOOD LIGHTS. HE FELT THIS WAS A REAL OLD FASHIONED COMMUNITY.

FOR MOST OF THE YEAR IT IS A BEAUTIFUL REFLECTING POOL. BUT FROM MID-MAY TO OCTOBER, IT IS COVERED WITH THE INVASIVE EUROPEAN WATER CHESTNUT. WE HAVE FOUND NO WAY TO RID THE POND OF THIS AND HAVE COME TO ACCEPT THAT NATURE WORKS IN WONDROUS AND NOT ALWAYS PLEASANT WAYS. THE REALITY IS, THE POND, LIKE MANY LIVING THINGS, WILL CHANGE. HERE IS A DESCRIPTION OF A FARM POND AGAIN BY FROM *BRAIDING SWEETGRASS* BY ROBIN WALL KIMMERER

LIKE MANY AN OLD FARM POND, MINE WAS THE VICTIM OF EUTROPHICATION, THE NATURAL PROCESS OF NUTRIENT ENRICHMENT THAT COMES WITH AGE. GENERATIONS OF ALGAE AND LILY PANDS AND FALLEN LEAVES AND AUTUMNS' APPLES FALLING INTO THE POND BUILT UP THE SEDIMENTS, LAYERING THE ONCE CLEAN GRAVEL AT THE BOTTOM IN A SHEET OF MULCH. ALL THOSE NUTRIENTS FEULED THE GROWTH OF NEW PLANTS, WHICH FUELED THE GROWTH OF MORE NEW PLANTS, IN AN ACCELERATING CYCLE. THIS IS THE WAY FOR MANY PONDS— THE BOTTOM GRADUALLY FILLS IN UNTIL THE POND BECOMES A MARSH AND MAYBE SOMEDAY A MEADOW AND THEN A FOREST. PONDS GROW OLD, AND THOUGH I WILL TOO, I LIKE THE ECOLOGICAL IDEA OF AGING AS PROGRESSIVE ENRICHMENT, RATHER THAN PROGRESSIVE LOSS.

NATURE CAN BE INSTRUCTIVE – AS IN THIS PIECE ABOUT A FARM POND. OUR EXPERIENCE OF NATURE GIVES US A SENSE OF BEING PART OF SOMETHING GREATER. ANANDA WROTE ME ABOUT HOW SHE FELT RIDING HER BIKE IN THE UPPER BEAVERKILL

WHILE I WAS BIKING I was thinking of some wonderful nature lessons/inspirations—so much material there always. Was thinking about how strong different parts of the plant are in various stages of life and was thinking about how to some people nature is just brutal, but there are so many examples of support systems and networks of communication (like we were talking about with the trees and fungi), support and community building going on all over the place with plants and animals and the impact of every leftover beaver damn, and if we just make space for it, all the answers about reuse, recycle, peaceful coexistence, tenacity and letting go and countless other things are already provided for us in nature if we would just stop and make space for it and listen.

IN THIS TALK, WE’VE EXPANDED OUR COMMUNITY FROM FAMILY, TO OUR NEIGHBORS AND CHURCH, TO THE RIVER AND TO NATURE. AN ESSENTIAL PART OF NATURE AND SOMETHING THAT AFFECTS US ALL DEEPLY ARE TREES.

I’VE BEEN READING RECENT STUDY OF TREES AND HOW THEY FORM COMMUNITY. FIRST I’LL READ THE REFERENCES TO TREES IN OUR BIBLE READINGS FOR TODAY. FROM EZEKIEL AND IN PSALM 92. **READ BOTH** EZEKIEL: ‘THE CEDAR – IT MAY PRODUCE AND BEAR FRUIT, AND BECOME A NOBLE CEDAR. UNDER IT EVERY BIRD WILL LIVE;’ IN THE SHADE OF ITS BRANCHES WILL NEST WINGED CREATURES OF EVERY KIND.

AND IN PSALMS; FLOURISH LIKE THE PALM TREE AND GROW LIKE THE CEDAR IN LEBANON. IN OLD AGE THEY STILL PRODUCE FRUIT; AND THEY ARE GREEN AND FULL OF SAP.

THE REFERENCE IN PSALMS MAKES ME THINK OF THE OLD APPLE TREES IN OUR YARD— MUST BE OVER 100 YEARS OLD AND STILL PRODUCING APPLES.

TREES NURTURE—BOTH HUMANS AND PLANT LIFE AROUND THEM.

IN 2018 I TALKED ABOUT THE BOOK “THE HIDDEN LIFE OF TREES’ BY PETER WOHLLEBEN, HE MAKES THE CONVINCING ARGUMENT THAT THE FOREST IS A SOCIAL NETWORK, TREES WORK TOGETHER TO PROTECT THEMSELVES AND, CONTINUE THEIR SPECIES. THEY WARN EACH OTHER OF DANGER BY EXCRETING CERTAIN SUBSTANCES, THEY SHARE NUTRIENTS WITH THOSE THAT ARE SICK THROUGH THEIR INTERTWINED ROOTS. HE MAINTAINS THAT TREES DON’T JUST HAVE A LEVEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS, THEY ALSO BUILD KNOWLEDGE DURING THEIR CENTURIES OF LIFE.

I ALSO REFERRED TO THE BOOK, “THE OVER STORY’ BY RICHARD POWERS. NINE CHARACTERS ARE INTRODUCED IN THE FIRST SECTION OF THIS NOVEL. EACH CHARACTER IS DEEPLY AFFECTED BY A TREE OR FOREST OF TREES.

ONE OF THE CHARACTERS WAS BASED ON SUZANNE SIMARD, WHO HAS JUST PUBLISHED A BOOK, “FINDING THE MOTHER TREE”. IN THIS BOOK SHE EXAMINES THE COMMUNICATION **UNDER** THE SOIL, AMONG THE ROOTS AND MULTIPLE FUNGI THAT ARE ALL BUSY WORKING DEEP IN THE GROUND.

SHE ALSO ARGUES THAT THERE ARE 'MOTHER TREES' THAT PROVIDE SUSTENANCE – AS WELL AS WISDOM TO THE YOUNGER TREES AROUND.

THE JACKET READS: SIMARD PROVES THE TRUE CONNECTEDNESS OF THE MOTHER TREE TO THE FOREST, NURTURING IT IN THE PROFOUND WAYS THAT FAMILIES AND HUMAN SOCIETIES NURTURE ONE ANOTHER, AND HOW THESE INSEPARABLE BONDS ENABLE ALL OUR SURVIVAL.”

SIMARD DESCRIBES A WESTERN RED CEDAR (CEDAR AGAIN) GRANDMOTHER TREE, “APPROXIMATELY 1000 YEARS OLD. BEFORE THE HARVEST THE PEOPLE PLACE THEIR HANDS ON THE TRUNK TO PRAY AND ASK PERMISSION FOR THE HARVEST, AND IN SO DOING THEY DEVELOP STRONG CONNECTIONS WITH THE TREE. THE INNER BARK IS USED FOR MAKING CEDAR BASKETS AND MATS, CLOTHING AND ROPE. THE STRIPS LEAVE A SHALLOW SCAR NARROW ENOUGH TO HEAL OVER.”

SHE GOES TO BRITANNIA MINE IN CANADA TO SEE THE DESTRUCTION THERE, CAUSED BY THE LARGEST MINE IN THE BRITISH EMPIRE, WHICH OPENED IN 1904. IT CLOSED IN 1974, LEAVING A WASTELAND BEHIND. BRITANNIA CREEK’S WATER WAS SO TOXIC AT THE MINE’S CLOSING THAT CHINOOK SALMON, WHEN INTRODUCED DIED WITHIN FORTY-EIGHT HOURS. WHEN IT FLOWED INTO THE OCEAN IT KILLED LIFE FOR AT LEAST TWO KILOMETERS ALONG THE SHORE.

SHE WENT THERE TO MEASURE THE IMPACT OF THESE POISONS ON THE SURROUNDING FOREST. SHE WROTE “ I WAS CURIOUS TO DISCOVER THE CAPACITY OF THE FOREST TO HEAL A BROKEN ECOSYSTEM, OF THE OLD TREES TO SEED INTO THE RAW EARTH, OF THE FUNGAL AND MICROBIOAL NETWORKS TO MEND THE DAMAGE.”

SHE WAS ENCOURAGED TO SEE HEMLOCK SEEDLINGS, THEN CENTIPEDES AND OTHER CREATURES IN THE FOREST FLOOR

AS SIMARD NEARED WHAT SHE IDENTIFIED AS THE MOTHER TREE, “CARPETS OF LUSH SEEDLINGS SWISHED AROUND MY ANKLES, AND TALLER HEMLOCKS GREW UP TOWARDS THE SKY. SHE WRITES: I KNOW WHY THESE SEEDLINGS ARE HEALTHY IN SPITE OF THE DAMAGE AND RAVAGES. THE SEEDS HERE HAD GERMINATED IN THE VAST MYCORRIZAL NETWORK OF THIS PARENT.

THEIR NASCENT ROOTS DRANK FROM THE NUTRITIOUS SOIL SUPPLIED THROUGH HER WEB. THE SHOOTS RECEIVED MESSAGES ABOUT HER PAST STRUGGLES, GIVING THEM A HEAD START. SHE WOULD BE HERE FOR HUNDREDS MORE YEARS, GUIDING THE RECOVERY, GIVING IT HER ALL, LONG AFTER I WAS GONE.”

I HAVE NEVER GIVEN TREES THE – WHAT I THINK OF AS HUMAN ASPECTS OF WISDOM, ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE AND THE DETERMINATION TO NURTURE AND HELP YOUNGER SAPLINGS— BUT READING THESE BOOKS HAS MADE ME LOOK DIFFERENTLY AT THE TREES ALONG THIS SIDE OF THE RIVER WHERE I WALK EVERY MORNING. THAT LAND HAD BEEN OPEN—A GOLF COURSE WAS THERE SO MANY OF THE TREES I SEE ARE ONLY AROUND 60 YEARS OLD. BUT THERE ARE A NUMBER OF VERY LARGE TREES- SYCAMORE, A FEW MAPLES THAT ARE MASSIVE AND BEECH TREES AS WELL AS WHITE PINE. NOW I LOOK AT THEM AS ‘MOTHER ‘TREES’

NURTURING AND TAKING CARE OF THE YOUNGER TREES AROUND THEM. IT’S NICE TO THINK OF MOTHER NATURE—**MOTHER NURTURE** LIKE THAT. A TREE LIVES IN A BROAD COMMUNITY

OF OTHER TREES, ANIMALS, RIVERS--- AND THEIR SUPPORT AND CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER IS A LESSON FOR OUR HUMAN COMMUNITY.

IN THIS TALK, WE'VE GONE FROM THE SMALL INDIVIDUAL COMMUNITY TO THE BROAD COMMUNITY OF NATURE—AND WE END UP BACK WITH THE IMAGE OF A FAMILY --- THE FAMILY OF TREES AND WHAT THEY HAVE TO TEACH.

WE DON'T HAVE TO BE A TREE HUGGER OR TO WORSHIP TREES TO RESPECT WHAT THEY STAND FOR; RELIANCE, PATIENCE, FLEXIBILITY , NURTURING---AND – IMPORTANT FOR OUR MESSAGE TODAY---COMMUNITY.'

WE ARE A TEAM/A COMMUNITY – NOT JUST AMONG OURSELVES, BUT A TEAM WITH THE INCREDIBLE FORCES OF NATURE.

BARBARA KINGSLOVER WROTE: FOR ALL THAT, TREES ARE THINGS TO US, GOOD FOR TABLES, FLOORS AND CEILING BEAMS; AS MUCH AS WE MIGHT ADMIRE THEM, WE'RE STILL HAPPY TO WALK ON THEIR HEARTS.