**Green Blades Preaching Roundtable**

Season after Pentecost

November 13, 2022

23rd Sunday after Pentecost; Proper 28(33)

Isaiah 65:17-25 and Isaiah 12; Malachi 4:1-2a and Psalm 98;

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Luke 21:5-19

Rev. Emily Meyer, Minneapolis, MN

Pollinator Pairs and Perception

What perceptions must be altered - and what spaces transformed - so that the forests and seas, the hills and the oceans can rejoice - and you and your community will be able to perceive that rejoicing, because you participated in God’s rising sun and experienced the healing in its wings?

Over the past two years I’ve been planting a small orchard on the land we steward (shout out to the Glenwood/Starbuck area!!). I’m up to four apples (if the one my spouse mowed down continues its slow return); two cherries; a peach (yep - it’s supposed to tolerate Minnesota winters - but it’s struggling, so we’ll see…); an apricot (it needs a pollinator buddy, so there’ll be another/different apricot next spring); and two pear. The second pear was planted this spring because like apricots, pears need to be planted in pairs, and my original second pear died from blight. I’m new at the orchard thing and didn’t react quickly enough to save the tree last fall. This spring, I chopped it off - down near the root ball - and hopeful new shoots came up - and then they, too, succumbed (the blight is in the roots!), withered and died. I am supposed to burn the whole thing to eliminate the bacteria and keep it from infecting the rest of my orchard: fire blight killed the tree, and now fire will kill the bacteria that caused it, so thank goodness for fire preventing the fire blight from spreading to my other trees…(!?!)

It’s a circuitous and somewhat confusing argument - but that seems to be the point. God’s work is not necessarily linear, nor is it easily predictable nor perceivable - sometimes we need a ‘pollinator pair’, a helpful counterpart, to open our eyes to the blossoms - so that we can watch for the fruition of God’s promises; we sometimes have to adjust our perception to taste that fruit as it ripens.

Malachi (paired with Psalm 98; it seems our two first readings also need pollinator buddies!) evokes my fire blighted pear tree: like it, God will leave ‘neither root nor branch’ of the sun-scorched, stubbly, oven-burned ‘arrogant…evildoers’; but the ‘sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings’ for those living in right relationships: the sun delivers both death and salve, depending upon our perception.

How we perceive the sun’s use depends on whether we have been ‘arrogant’ and ‘evil’ (that’s an interesting pairing of terms), or right in our relationships with humans and other parts of creation. Do we know how the sun will shine on us? How do we know if we are the ‘righteous’ or the ‘arrogant evildoers’? Is it a matter of our perception? Or will we have to trust God’s?

This year’s Pheasant Opener was October 15; we spent the day with a dear friend walking his family land near Wheaton (whoot whoot, Wheaton!!). The roosters were young; we’re sure several got away under the guise of looking like a hen - and they were few and far between - an unusual turn of events for the western prairies of Minnesota, especially given that the corn harvest was in full swing in adjacent fields. Birds should have been flushing constantly into the wet and predator-unfriendly cattails.

But the cattails weren’t wet or predator-unfriendly. They were caked; not just dry as in no mud, but caked, cracked, dusty earth instead of a slough.

The cattail sloughs declare that Malachi’s ‘day’ has come (again): the sun is burning like an oven and the roots and branches of systems of consumerism, privilege, and supremacy - including all the ways we as individuals and faith families participate in and benefit from them - are being ‘burned up’. Where and how, then, can we look for the sun of righteousness? Where and how will we perceive a sun rising with healing in its wings?

Like our fledgling roosters, God’s promise is often wrapped in the guise of hardship: many of us who are comfortable in the *status quo* may struggle to perceive it. It is a matter of perspective - as in, where and how are we situated? Becoming stubble, succumbing to the oven’s heat, betrayal and death - these are only one part of the cycle or one piece of the story - a story that requires a pollinator buddy to reach its full conclusion.

This would be a wonderful Sunday to use all the senses to create wonder - both as in ‘wonder about’ and as in ‘awe’. Wondering helps us shift our perception - and awe teaches us how. Let the music of whales, birds, water, and wind be the prelude/special music; let images of extraordinary landscapes, animals, and plants, actual flowers and other flora, a harvest cornucopia, serve as banners and paraments; fill the sanctuary (or be outside??!) with natural scents (that don’t assault anyone’s allergies); create a sensory walk - splash hands in water, feel flower petals and tree bark, experience wind on the skin, and tickle toes with sand - as a Sharing of the Peace[[1]](#footnote-1); let Holy Communion become a full meal, or make it extra sensory rich using champagne/sparkling cider and real, home-baked (gluten free) bread.[[2]](#footnote-2) Build in as many sensory experiences as possible - especially those new or unusual for a worship setting. Frame them all as opportunities for wonder.

Then, shift perception.

Ed Yong’s, [An Immense World](https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/616914/an-immense-world-by-ed-yong/)[[3]](#footnote-3), explores the diversity of perception in the natural world - such as echolocation, magnetic fields, and ultraviolet vision - as he underscores the limitations of human perception. [Terry Gross](https://www.npr.org/people/2100593/terry-gross)’s Fresh Air (NPR) interview with Yong provides beautiful soundbites[[4]](#footnote-4). The interview alone might inspire folx to simultaneously accept the limitations of our senses and open to awe and wonder to what a different perception reveals.

Might we discover Good News where we thought/assumed/interpreted only wrath and death?

Jesus’ commentary about the Temple’s destruction, imprisonment, betrayal, and war all sounds frightening to those of us who are not living in the destruction of our cultural and religious institutions, those of us not currently imprisoned for our political activism, not betrayed by our loved ones for doing what was just and right rather than what was comfortable and ‘normal’, not living through the ravages of war. But I imagine that destruction sounds like liberation when it means systems of oppression will be overturned. This is Good News for Northern Minnesota Water Protectors and Black Lives Matter protestors jailed for opposing corporate greed and legalized inequity; for women’s rights advocates betrayed by their families; for librarians and election officials who fear for their lives because of their commitment to letting every voice - including creation’s - be heard. The rest of us - and I am first in line - we see the wars, the nations rising against nations, the insurrections (yes - Jesus lists ‘insurrection’ on this list!!), the earthquakes, plagues and famines - and we still haven’t taken a prophetic stand; we have not grasped our opportunity to testify.

PREACHERS. TEACHERS: these are our times!!! Jesus is calling us to testify, to risk arrest and maybe even death: that is what is required of us as Followers of the Way.

And even in that fearful stance, Jesus promises: YOU WILL NOT PERISH. That’s the pollinator pair to all the frightening reality of the text - and our world: You will not perish.

That sounds crazy, even unbelievable, but we can believe because we have seen God’s promises bear fruit before.

Isaiah 65 is the pollinator pair - the blossoming - of Isaiah 12: in the midst of great despair (Isaiah 12; the Assyrian despotism), God’s people learn that life is going to get worse before it gets better - then Isaiah 65 reveals the fruit of that promise.

The in-between time is often experienced as God’s anger, God turning away, God’s wrath, even: we walk the parched prairie and grieve God’s absence and inaction. But Isaiah 65 reveals that our tears flow from the well of salvation - and this is water we are invited to draw with joy. Lament and joy cross-pollinate to blossom into God’s healing, this promised transformation of both heaven and earth (which means all humanity and creation), which will usher in longevity and more sustainable and joyful living.[[5]](#footnote-5)

But even *that* fruit requires a check on perception: Isaiah 65 promises an exiled people that God will make a new heaven and new earth. But the last time God did this it meant 40 years of wandering the wastelands, feeling destitute, and learning an entirely new social structure. This might be God’s signature move: wandering in creation transforms us, reorients us, shows us new ways (see Yong’s interview): creation is our pollinator pair: God uses creation to show us a different way of living as humans - a slower, less consuming, less-work-more-trusting way.

This more trusting way is hard to find or define in our consumerist, supremacy-based society. To help us see more clearly, 2 Thessalonians conflates ‘idleness’ and ‘busybodies’. Here’s another perception switch! How can these two things be the same? My most frequent resource request is for curricula that will be really easy for leaders to teach. This “quick and easy” approach to faith formation has not worked in a very, very long time - it is the epitome of idle busybody-ness. Rather, we are called to do the work of actual faith formation - as in growth - through resting in trust, service to creation and others, contemplative practices, justice-and-peace-making - and see how our spiritual awakening can contribute to slowing down, consuming less, demanding less of others, and building more sustainable lives for ourselves, other humans, and the planet.

If we are ready to learn, creation, too, will be transformed. Ed Yong says the natural world adapts because of how we/other beings perceive it, “...beauty, as we know it, is not only in the eye of the beholder, it arises because of that eye.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Might shifting our perception be an act of participation in God’s rising sun with healing wings? Wonder and awe help us appreciate the extraordinary gift that is life, that is this one, holy and beautiful creation, that is this planet. Wonder and awe, creation, is our pollinator pair: we need time in creation to be transformed, and in being transformed, we might begin to *see* this planet into its days of rejoicing.

Hymn Suggestion: Earth and All Stars (Herb Brokering)

Rev. Emily Meyer (she/her), Executive Director of The Ministry Lab

As an ordained pastor in the ELCA, Emily interned in Seaside, OR, served as pastor, liturgical artist, and faith formation leader in suburban, ex-urban and rural Minnesota congregations, created and directed the multi-congregational affirmation of baptism program, Confirmation Reformation, and was pastor of Fullness of God Lutheran Church in the retreat center, [Holden Village](http://www.holdenvillage.org/). She currently serves as executive director of [The Ministry Lab](https://www.theministrylab.org/) (St Paul, MN), where she consults and curates and creates resources for progressive UCC, UMC, and PC(USA) congregations throughout Minnesota and the United Theological Seminary community. Rev. Meyer leads contemplative and creative retreats and small groups. Between pastoral gigs, she has enjoyed costume designing, choreographing, and performing. She lives in Minneapolis, MN, with spouse Brian, daughter Natasha, and two Wirehaired Pointing Griffons, Kiko and Zip.

1. Thanks to Rachel Casper and the team at Eden Prairie UMC who introduced me to the helpfulness of multisensory experiences as they prepared their Adaptive VBS last summer (see here: https://prairiechurch.org/vacation-bible-school/). People with various special needs find multisensory interactions to be stimulating and helpful in processing new information and experiences; it can be helpful for all people to explore in new ways. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Popping a sparkling cider or wine cork in the worship service allows for the additional sensory experiences of anticipation and excitement, and the sound and smell as the aroma bursts from the bottle.

   Here’s a simple Unity Bread recipe for intergenerational baking fun: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nNCdE_ZY0y7bV872kWwXYaHCKi2ONq4UkK5sl3Wl1JE/edit?usp=sharing>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Yong, Ed. *An Immense World: How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us*; Random House; June 21, 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Gross, Terry. [Fresh Air Interview](https://www.npr.org/2022/10/13/1128686365/the-human-sensory-experience-is-limited-journey-into-the-world-that-animals-know), “The human sensory experience is limited. Journey into the world that animals know”; NPR; October 13, 2022. https://www.npr.org/2022/10/13/1128686365/the-human-sensory-experience-is-limited-journey-into-the-world-that-animals-know [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Western supremacy culture boasts that each generation lives longer than the last; proof that we are always ‘improving’. Yet, recent research shows this generation will not out-live their parents: we are beginning to decline in life expectancy due to climate change related malnutrition, displacement, hunger/drought, etc. See Schlemmer, Liz, “Duke Researchers: Life Expectancy Down For Gen-Xers and Millennials”; North Carolina Public Radio. 12.21.18.

   <https://www.wunc.org/health/2018-12-21/duke-researchers-life-expectancy-down-for-gen-xers-and-millennials> (accessed 10.14. 22); and [Kate Sheridan](https://www.statnews.com/staff/kate-sheridan/), “U.S. life expectancy drops sharply, the second consecutive decline”; Stat News, 08.31.22; <https://www.statnews.com/2022/08/31/u-s-life-expectancy-drops-sharply-the-second-consecutive-decline/> (accessed 10.14.2). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid.; Interview Highlights: On What We Are Missing in Human Vision Compared to Insects (https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2022/06/22/1105849864/immense-world-ed-yong-animal-perception-echolocation). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)