

Take a Walk in the Woods
Vestry Reflection by Kim Henderson
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During this joyful, but stressful time of year, I wanted to take the focus off our multi-screening days and reflect upon something that may be lacking in the busyness of our lives and that is, our connection to nature.

The average American spends 90% of their life indoors and 11 hours a day on screens. There is truly an epidemic of Nature-Deficit Disorder—a term coined by Richard Louv, author of Last Child in the Woods.

“Nature-Deficit Disorder describes the human cost of alienation from nature, among them: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties and higher rates of physical and emotional illness. BUT, mindful time in nature can reconnect us with the more than human world in which we live.

Albert Einstein knew the importance of the connection. “Look deep into nature,” he said, “and then you will understand everything better.”

In 1845, Henry David Thoreau sought to rediscover the connection by opting out of society. For the course of two years, two months, and two days he stayed in a cabin he built near Walden Pond where he experienced the healing power of the natural world. He reflected, “There are moments when all anxiety and stated toil are becalmed in the infinite leisure and repose of nature.

In Rachel Carson’s words, “Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature -- the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter.”

And John Muir, “Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop away from you like the leaves of Autumn.”

And finally Robin Wall Kimmerer, author of Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, “The land knows you, even when you are lost. The land is the real teacher. All we need as students is mindfulness.”

Florence Williams’s best-selling book, The Nature Fix has a chapter dedicated to the benefits of forest therapy. And now, it appears that more doctors are starting to incorporate spending time in forests into their practice.

A recent NYT article entitled “Take a Walk in the Woods. Doctor’s Orders.” highlighted the healing powers nature can provide.

“Forest bathing,” or immersing yourself in nature, is being embraced by doctors and others as a way to combat stress and improve health.

Some studies, suggest that spending time in nature, specifically in lush forests, might decrease stress and blood pressure, improve heart function, lower cortisol levels and boost one’s mood.

I, myself, feel a close connection with our fine-feathered friends and am truly at peace when I can observe them in their natural setting. As John James Audubon reflected, “I never for a day gave up listening to the songs of our birds, or watching their peculiar habits, or delineating them in the best way I could.

So step away from the screens, go outside, find solace in the natural world and take in this final reflection from John Muir,

“Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul.”