

Pinecones and Mushrooms

After the first couple of months of confinement, I started walking the length of the long drive at Roslyn a couple of times a day. You'd think that it would get boring, but the flora and fauna have drawn me in with Beatrix Potter-like glimpses into their habits and habitats. I peer into doorways in the hollows of tree trunks, and tiptoe past grand earthen entrances to underground cities surrounded by garlands of moss and violets that would make the fancy catalog decorators weep. The rock-edged drainage culverts leading out from the hills and under the drives serve as well-traveled groundhog highways. I explain regularly to the enormous flotilla of Canada geese that they might enjoy CANADA this time of year (they show no interest, in Canada or in me, I'm sorry to say). Most mornings, three bluebirds swoop and loop as I pass the big loblolly pine at the bend in the drive, apparently rehearsing for a remake of the Snow White dressmaking scene. And I've certainly figured out why the local university chose spiders as their mascot -- those omnipresent arachnids will prevail when all else has gone down to the dust.



There is so much to see in God's breathtaking creation, when we slow down (by force, some of us) long enough to look. God's plan is so much bigger, richer, more intricate, more colorful -- and more sufficient unto itself -- than we can imagine, or remember, especially in times when it feels like the world, and our options and resources and futures, are closing in.

What I've noticed the last few weeks are the pinecones and the mushrooms. Being new to these parts, I am scooping up the prickly loblolly pinecones and squirreling them away in the potting shed for Christmas. Where I come from, you have to buy pinecones in bags at the store (also dirt, but that's another reflection), so this feels like a bonanza. I look around for the symmetrical ones that have opened up, and I stuff them into my distended hoodie pockets. I learned not to wait too long when I see the good ones, because when it rains -- I don't know exactly how or why, but after it rains, there aren't any wide-open ones. I can't imagine how or why they would close up, but something happens, and they are all closed-up and soggy. Pinecones are sunshine treasures.

However, on those same foggy, soggy mornings, profligate mushroom magic springs forth from some unseen subterranean matrix -- huge white umbrellas in the mown fields, tiny red-capped domes in the pine needles, something that looks like a garden of brioches growing by the neighbor's fence, extravagant bohemian fringes on the downed logs over in the shady dell by the road to



the canal, and a monstrous woody eruption that has endured many mowings of its crabgrass camouflage. The mushrooms will remain, morphing in shape and color, until the next bright, sunny day, when by the evening walk, most have vanished back into the safety of leaf mold and thatch.



Maybe we're a little like that, if we could only remember. Maybe some folks, and some traits, open up in strong light and heat, and pull in when it's dark and damp. And other folks, and other traits, emerge to surprise us when the rain sets in. Maybe God has given us all secret subterranean strengths and connections that only become visible when we are able to finish lamenting the pinecones we could have picked up yesterday (if only we'd known it was going to rain) and pay attention instead to what is growing today. Maybe there is miracle and magic in our rainy days, too.

Many of our leaders feel the unbearable pressure of believing they have to hold together a world that is falling apart -- and many of us anxiously look to them expecting them to do just that. Maybe we all need to exhale and go mushroom hunting. These days are not sunny, and our pinecones are looking like they'll never open again. But they will. They will! We are called only to be faithful, as God is faithful, and to hold fast to our faith, the rock on which our house is built. The rains may come, the winds may blow, but this house that is God's church, built on the rock of faith, will withstand it. Look around. God's creation, God's plan, God's providence, is beyond our imagination. Just look for it. There are mushrooms all around us.



Blessings --

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