

I-K Lutheran

Where God is doing new things

January 2020



While walking our dog, Karley, early one December morning, the sun just rising in the east, I heard a strange chirping, chortling, nearly barking sound echoing in the space between our house and our neighbors'. I left the security of the sidewalk to peer through the dusky dawn light in hope of catching a glimpse of what odd animal might be there. My heart rate rose as I shuffled closer.

Nothing. I saw nothing. Yet the volume of the sound grew, and the strange cackle-call surrounded me. I pulled poor Karley closer, fearful, I must admit, that something lurked and threatened, heard but not seen, in the shadows.

Slowly backing my way to the sidewalk, I realized that the sound was not a single voice, but many, and it came not from the earth, but the sky. I looked up and there they were, filling the sky, hundreds of them, huge as pterodactyls, a cacophony of croaking, chortling, chiding as they took turns at various places in their ever reforming and elongated "V". The sight and sound of them was overwhelming. My heart pounded again, now in wonder, as I stood still, staring starward and listening with much more than my ears.

And then, a minute or two later, they were gone. All sound went with them as the last in line faded into the southern sky. Karley and I were alone again, standing together in stunned silence, wrapped in the crisp December cold, inhaling wonder, exhaling awe.

Back in the house (and grateful for Google), I found the sound I had heard and discovered that I had been witness to the migration of Sandhill Cranes. Their calls can be heard more than two miles away. Sandhill cranes, not pterodactyls after all, but no less a wonder to hear and behold.

Two poems came to my mind as I read about these cranes and listened to recordings of their calls: one from an ancient Christian mystic quoted in an Advent devotional that my wife Janet and I were reading, the other from a longtime favorite Lutheran pastor/theologian/poet. Each in their own way, these poems resound with the call of the cranes and point a way forward for me from that December morning into the new year rising. Perhaps they will also be helpful guides for you, as you step out into breaking dawn to walk through the gift of a new year, looking and listening for the promised and surprising presence of God.

Every single creature is full of God
and is a book about God.
Every creature is a word of God.
If I spend enough time with
the tiniest creature, even a caterpillar,
I would never have to prepare a sermon.
So full of God is every creature.

—Meister Eckhart

Can it be that grace takes us by surprise
in the midst of the ordinary and the repeated?
Why shouldn't this be so,
because grace is from outside us,
not within?
It is God's interruption,
his wonderful invitation.

Grace is God at his unpredictable best.
No vision of Christ duplicates another,
for love defies the stereotype.
To believe is to live in perpetual surprise
and expectation.

—Gerhard Frost

Bishop Bill Gafkjen

Check out https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Sandhill_Crane/overview and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EckKXUersb8> to learn about and hear these amazing creatures.

Eckhart quote: Boss, Gayle. All Creation Waits: The Advent Mystery of New Beginnings. Paraclete Press. Kindle Edition.

Frost quote: Frost, Gerhard. Journey of the Heart: Reflections on Life's Way. © 1995 Augsburg Fortress.



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