

## “Speaking the Unspoken”

Rev. David Gregory

October 4, 2020

Pentecost 18



### Readings

*Psalm 19:1-4*

from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson

God’s glory is on tour in the skies,  
God-craft on exhibit across the horizon.  
Madame Day holds classes every morning,  
Professor Night lectures each evening.

Their words aren’t heard,  
their voices aren’t recorded,  
but their silence fills the earth:  
unspoken truth is spoken everywhere.

*Why I Wake Early*

by Mary Oliver

Hello, sun in my face.  
Hello, you who make the morning  
and spread it over the fields  
and into the faces of the tulips  
and the nodding morning glories,  
and into the windows of, even, the  
miserable and crotchety –  
best preacher that ever was,  
dear star, that just happens  
to be where you are in the universe  
to keep us from ever-darkness,  
to ease us with warm touching,  
to hold us in the great hands of light –  
good morning, good morning, good morning.

Watch, now, how I start the day  
in happiness, in kindness.

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Today we offer our prayers of healing for the President and his family. As members of the human family we are rightly and naturally touched by the infirmities of others, regardless of political perspective, and we desire healing for every victim of the corona virus. Let this be a moment where we renew our call to love our neighbor as ourselves, to follow the the best scientific guidelines in the wearing of masks, in social distancing, and in paying attention to vulnerabilities of those around us who may be profoundly affected by our behavior. Even when we show no signs or symptoms, the possibility remains that we could be infected without knowing it, passing the virus on to the most vulnerable around us and among us. This is just one of several reasons why we are delaying our return to gathering in person until we can be confident that it is indeed the loving thing to do. This continues to be a moral decision for us and not a political one, and we'll keep right on doing what we're doing, creating cohesive community wherever, whenever, and however we can. We are grateful for your patience and your resilience during this time.

Over the past several weeks I have been consciously reaching for ideas, interactions, and experiences that are edifying; by that I mean things that nourish my spirit and build me up instead of those that give me more reasons to fear. From an evolutionary perspective, we're all aware of the "fight or flight" response, that adrenalin rush that happens in the presence of danger, be it real or perceived. The human body is an amazingly fine-tuned machine, and the typical fear response alerts us and provides us energy for survival. What we see in the animal kingdom is a good illustration of how this is supposed to work.

A couple of days ago I spent a little time in the church office which opens out into a lush green lawn overlooking the bay. In the absence of people at the top of Rock Hill, it seems the deer have decided that this area belongs to them now. It's not unusual to find a number of them on the lawn at any given time. They appear calm, serene, and happy, until one of our neighbors shuts a car door or turns on a leaf blower. In that instance of perceived danger, the deer will leap through the hedges and out of sight. But a few minutes later they might be right back where they were, serene and happy once again. I marvel at how quickly they return to their default setting. If only we humans could do the same. The real or perceived threats to our existence and to our way of life are never as succinct and clear as a door slamming.

What we're living with is the constant drip of difficult news of wildfires, the pandemic, racial injustice, and violence in the streets. Millions of people are languishing without adequate income or healthcare, and the numbers are growing every day. The stress of daily existence is keeping many of us locked in a state of fear, meaning that the same flight response which is meant to protect us from specific and momentary danger becomes a chronic way of life. We don't return to our normal, serene selves every five or ten minutes like the animals do. They seem to be able to flip the switch when they need to. We are not so adept.

Today marks the first Sunday of October, specifically the Feast of St. Francis. It has become our custom on this day to welcome our favorite creatures and their loved ones to a Blessing of the Animals on this same lawn that the deer have claimed for themselves. I did my best to uphold that tradition yesterday through my office window facing the statue of St. Francis and asking the deer to hold this space for us for next year's feast day when we hope to join them once again.

In the spirit of edification, and a desire to calm our souls and bring us to our serene default, I offer from today's Psalm the opportunity to remember and bask in the divine beauty of the world that we inhabit, to look at the sun, the moon, the stars, the planets in their orbit, the enduring ecosystems of our own planet, and the woven intricacies of the human body, knowing that it's not their words that are heard, it's not their voices that are recorded. It is their silence that fills the earth, and it is their unspoken truth that is spoken everywhere. This unspoken truth tells us many things. It tells us that the noise is only for a time; that the injustices cannot stand forever; that our fears need not get the better of us; that we can enjoy a peace that surpasses human understanding because it is fully known in the animal kingdom. There is this wordless, communal reckoning going on. Though the skies are filled with smoke, with hot dry winds adding to the fury, though our streets are filled with angry people with emboldened proud boys standing by, and though every single day seems to contain an earth-shattering cataclysm of human drama, there is this single, still, small voice within us speaking peace without words, flipping our adrenal switches to the off position so that we can—on a consistent daily basis—find the grace that helps us in our time of need. We are reminded often of familiar words in the letter to the Philippians:

*Be anxious about nothing. Pray about everything. And the peace that surpasses human understanding will build a garrison around your heart in the example of Jesus.*

It occurs to me today that this might not be a prayer of begging for the things we want, but instead a simple alignment with who we really are, the expression of our divine source, the river of our own creative energy. Our most effective prayers have always been our wordless ones, the ones that are felt instead of crafted, spontaneous rather than liturgical, free-flowing and personal instead of being institutionally driven. If there were the words to speak them, they might resemble those of Mary Oliver.

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