

**Sermon for September 8, 2019**  
**Season of Creation: Summer into Fall**  
**Church of Reconciliation**  
**The Rev. Judith L. Rhodes**  
***Rise up singing, O Body of Wild Souls!***

All week long as I have been preparing to preach on this first Sunday of the Season of Creation, 2019, I have been “listening” and “singing along” to Ella Fitzgerald’s amazing rendition of George Gershwin’s song, “Summertime” ...

(Rusty plays YouTube)

There’s a lot of good theology in those lyrics. And the truth of the matter is that once upon a time, we could take the verse, “Summertime and the living is easy, fish are jumping and the cotton is high...” for granted. These days, the truth is that we live with the impact of climate change, more noticeable in the summer here in Texas as temperatures soar, sea life is dying off with plastics in the waters, and so much of Creation is groaning around the world. What this means is that “living is... anything but easy.”

My brothers and sisters in Christ, this Season of Creation begins and will continue on a contemplative note. Each Sunday, you will be invited into an experience of contemplative silence as the season or seasons focused on that Sunday are presented for your quiet reflection. I ask you to breathe deeply of this opportunity to really, truly, deeply listen to the sounds of Nature that will fill your hearing. I ask you to give yourself over to seeing, really seeing the beauty, the majesty, the glory of God’s Creation right before your eyes. Immerse yourself in the experience and notice how these images speak to you and evoke feelings within you. Take notice of what those feelings are and take them into your week to pray with and to be grateful for the gifts of Nature that our Creator has given to teach us how to walk in such beauty in our own lives.

Gershwin’s lyrics also remind us of the hope by which we are each saved as Paul so powerfully writes in our Epistle from Romans today. In Gershwin’s song, we hear... *“One of these mornings, you’re gonna rise up singing. Yes, you’ll spread your wings and you’ll take to the sky. But til that morning, there’s nothing can harm you. ... with daddy and mammy standing by.”*

In Paul’s text, we hear these words: *For hope we were saved... Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; ... that Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”*

How blessed we are to hear these words of assurance given to us as the long hot summer wanes. Just as the earth is parched so can our very souls feel the dryness of spirit in seasons of doubt, despair, or danger.

I have lived into seasons of my life when the landscape of my soul feels all too much like a desert. When my prayer life is seemingly non-existent, and when I am only eating, “the bread of anxiety” to fill my insatiable appetite. The temptation in those times is to withdraw. To isolate myself. To turn away from every offer of support or care. To turn away from the Divine the only source of healing and hope.

What about you? How has your summer unfolded? This long Texas heat wave still steamy drives us into airconditioned spaces away from the beauty of Nature and the presence of strangers and friends we meet along the way as we stroll or hike, bike or row. Summertime can mark a season of dryness and isolation, of forgetting the assurances of our faith, that in all seasons, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

It is this Jesus, our Savior and Brother, who reminds us so many times in the Gospels to believe and to trust enough in his abiding presence that we do not give into fear. That we believe and trust that even in seasons of scorching heat and parched landscape, the living water he gives is always abundantly available.

The season of high temperatures also serves to remind us of living in balance, of not overextending ourselves physically, emotionally, spiritually. Seeking balance in our lives restores us to health and wholeness, relationship and joy.

The sounds of the natural world sing with joy! Crickets chirping, birds singing, giving way to rustling leaves, and changing colors. All these gifts of the natural world are given to us by the Creator to teach us lessons about the freedom that is ours in Jesus Christ.

In his pamphlet, ***Living in Rhythm: Following Nature’s Rule***, Brother James Koester, Superior of the Society of St. John the Evangelist, an Anglican religious order of Monks, writes:

*When we begin to be attentive to the work of the Creator, it can transform the way we are alive to the lessons unfolding around us. We notice purpose and intention behind the beauty. There is form and structure and order in creation put there by the hand of the Chief Gardener who tends it. Seen from a distance the natural world may look crazy and chaotic- just a jungle to us – and yet, nature much more dependent and interdependent than we might think. ... Trees can communicate with one another underground through the root system, and in the air, through their leaves, allowing them to synchronize the production of leaves and seeds as well as to prepare themselves for an invasion of pests.*

We human beings have so much to learn from Creation... and to dare to take to heart the lessons of dependence and interdependence. Lessons we so often only resist but to our peril and the peril of all creatures with whom we share the natural world and the life cycles needing so desperately to stay in balance.

Over vacation, I read an absolutely spellbinding, beauty of a book, ***The Great Conversation: Nature and the Care of the Soul*** by Belden Lane, Professor Emeritus of Theological Studies at Saint Louis University. Please find it in a library or read it on your Kindle, or if you are like me, buy it on Amazon and begin to write in every margin how it impacts your soul.

Lane writes this:

*We're surrounded by a world that talks, but we don't listen. We're part of a community engaged in a vast conversation, but we deny our role in it. We haven't the courage to acknowledge our desperate need for what we can't explain. **The soul feeds on what takes us to the edge, but we don't go there willingly.***

*Conversely, the Earth needs us right now, given the immense threat of climate change, species loss, and environmental destruction. **The planet longs for a body of wild souls who will love it intensely, acting boldly on its behalf.***

My friends in Christ, are we willing to go to the edge of love willingly trusting in the assurance of the Divine's presence with us in all seasons and all times? Are we willing to become "a body of wild souls who will love Earth and all creation intensely, acting boldly on its behalf? Are we willing to learn the lessons seeded in Creation?

This is why we immerse ourselves in the season of creation not only because of the climate crisis we are in but also because it is a matter of life and transformation for our very souls.

Lane continues:

*The natural world is full of teachers ready to carry us into amazement. Experiencing them, however, means making ourselves vulnerable to nature's wild splendor. That's the paradox explored by this book. Only in risking ourselves to wind and fire, cave and tree, birdsong and wolf-cry can we grasp the language of glory whispered through it all. These are the teachers whose lessons cannot be studied from the safety of armchairs. They require "absolute contact" as Muir insisted. They demand our falling in love, crazy, self-Abandoning love- in giving ourselves to wild things. When we understand the spiritual life as a progression that echoes the Earth's natural patterns of seasonal change, we find instructors to whom we can apprentice ourselves all along the way.*

He asks, "Can you imagine apprenticing yourself to the birds that gather at a feeder in your backyard? Or perhaps becoming a student of the stars at a time in your life when your horizons need expanding? If you live in a city, you might spend time with a littered urban creek, when a flow of creative energy has slowed in your life.

Such are the wild, wonderful, mysterious and divinely given gifts seeded in Creation to heal and restore our very souls. And in noticing, a deeper awareness breaks through to our collective soul so that real healing, restoration, and reconciliation may be experience by all Creation as the Creator has intended from before time.

My prayer is this that as you and I move from summer into fall we open ourselves, our bodies, minds and spirits, more widely than we ever imagined possible and learn, really learn the lessons of dependence, interdependence and healthy rhythm of life in which we will truly discover abundant life meant for all God's Beloveds, all God's Creation, singing out in joy! May we willingly risk going to the edge in order to become the body of wild souls created in the image and likeness of the Divine, loving intensely all along the way.

Only then will we rise up singing alongside the whole created order!

Amen.