

Terry Overfelt

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OUR FAITH STORY AS REVEALED IN CREATION

Theme: The Good shepherd leads us to green pastures to nurture, delight and teach us.

John 10:11-18 and Psalm 23

I. The Shepherd

The Good Shepherd, in today's scripture from the gospel of John knows the sheep, and willingly risks his life to protect them, even laying it down. The Good Shepherd in this morning's reading from Psalm 23 is also leading the flock, to green pastures.

In light of today being centered in our stewardship season and **Earth Day**, I'd like to suggest that this guiding shepherd God who watches over us (everyone say baaa) is leading us to the green places where beauty is overflowing. The creation is to nurture us, to delight us and to teach us...you restore my soul!

Affirming the God whisper on the wind on Friday morning, the Regional Assembly opened with the reading of the 23rd Psalm.

This is one of the most popular of the 150 Psalms. Many times it is spoken as a comfort at funerals when a loved one has come to their ultimate rest.

Yet nowhere in this psalm does it say the shepherd led them there to die!

It says...yea though I walk! It says...my whole life long.

Today, we celebrate these scriptures as road map for our journey.

Go out to pasture, now!

II. The Deficit

We are living in a time of absence of engagements with the natural world...we aren't headed for the green pasture our shepherd is calling us to.

More alarmingly, *"the divide between children and the outdoors directly links the absence of nature in the lives of today's wired generation to some of the most disturbing childhood trends: the rise in obesity, attention disorders and depression."*

Richard Louv's book, **Last Child in the Woods**, *"...is the first to bring together a body of research indicating that direct exposure to nature is essential for healthy childhood development for the physical and emotional health of children and adults."*

Louv names: **Nature Deficit Disorder**. In summary he says: *"Kids are well aware of the global threats to the environment, but their physical contact, their intimacy*

with nature on a day-to-day basis, is fading.

A fifth-grader in a San Diego classroom put it succinctly: 'I like to play indoors better 'cause that's where all the electrical outlets are.'"

As a result, children's worlds, limitless in cyberspace, are shrinking in reality.

As the nature deficit grows, new studies demonstrate just how important direct contact with the outdoors is to healthy human development.

Most of the new evidence that connects nature to well-being and restoration has focused on adults, but during the past decade, scientists have begun to study the impact of nearby nature on child development.

Environmental psychologists reported that nature in or around the home, or simply a room with a view of a natural landscape, helped protect the psychological well-being of the children.

Researchers have found that children with disabilities gain enhanced body image and positive behavior changes through direct interaction with nature. Studies of outdoor education programs geared toward troubled youth — especially those diagnosed with mental-health problems — show a clear therapeutic value.”

Louv continues: “ *In education, we can build a No Child Left Inside movement. And we can challenge environmental organizations to take this issue seriously. For if the disconnection between children and nature continues, who will become the future stewards of the earth?” (God gave dominion to humankind... Genesis 2:26)*

III. The **Wonders**

The wonders of nature are filled with mirrors and metaphors of the holy. The good shepherd knows that, and **is leading us.**

Nollie and Julia, sent us a Colorado mountain view last July with the caption: I saw God today.

John Rawlings has taken many beautiful pictures in nature including the big tree at the outdoor worship in all seasons.

Taby sent pictures Friday of the deer and the bald eagles along the trail.

How can I say there is no God when all around creation calls?

We are seeing God
on the mountaintop,
every changing season,
and in all creatures.

The spiritual richness in beholding and wonder **restores our souls!**

The shepherd is leading us to see this gift.

III. The Possibilities

Lambs of God...we can preserve the open space in our cities, and even design and build new kinds of communities, like the VBS movement last summer to take in our community and urban gardens.

Like the prompt today to sign up for summer camps!

We are so blessed with the acreage here at Broadway.

Our 8:00 community worship outdoors, when warm weather finally comes.

What will you do today **to restore your soul?**

IV: The Butterfly

Once the monarch migration came down my neighborhood on Trotter way when I was a child; I stood in awe while the overhead sky filled with orange and black wonder, awed by butterflies.

My favorites are the little yellow ones.

Having captured one, I put it under a hamburger meal basket while I went in for lunch. When I came out again the basket was still upside down but in place of the

butterfly was a little roll of life savers. Someone helped me believe in the magic.

The symbol of Christ: Butterflies have been regarded as symbol for the human soul since ancient time, and also in the Christian tradition.

We can see the notoriously, very hungry, caterpillar who one day stops eating, attaches himself to a tree twig, spins a silken thread to hold him as he spins itself a silky cocoon or molts into a shiny chrysalis. As he releases his own hold, and hangs in the transformative cocoon, he reflects the willingness of Jesus; last supper, surrendered, crucified, entombed, and radically risen to newness!

The transformation of caterpillars into butterflies in nature is telling the story of Christian tradition in symbol and even offering proof of possibility.

The Teacher:

Here in our church, the banners during the season of Lent held the three chrysalis cocoons that are now spun around to be the three butterflies; three chosen to represent our triune God in Creator, Son and Holy Spirit.

The butterfly has much to teach us about our souls,
I'd like us to sit in the **green pasture** and consider **lessons** from the butterfly, effect in the world, imagining, and respect.

The Effect The influence of the beat of tiny wings was noted in 1964 when mathematician and meteorologist, Edward Lorenz observed environmental effects that he noted in the slightest variation of data. He was predicting weather patterns and when a differentiation as small as the effect of a butterfly was entered, the rippling outcome could be like that a butterfly winging in Brazil ultimately setting the conditions in motion that would end up as a tornado in Texas.

The graphing pattern of this data resembled the wings of a butterfly...thus coined the Butterfly Effect. The tiny ripples of our choices, like the butterfly winging, reflect the reach of our own beliefs and choices.

This is what the shepherd would have us realize when the butterfly lights near us in this green pasture. This is where all actions and words spoken and set in the name of God for love, for gratitude, for hope, have the power to

change the world one tiny gesture of faithfulness at a time.

Sometimes these flutterings need to be intentional, for our sakes and the sake of the world. Even the very real holding of questions and doubts, the turning away, in broken despair, will have an effect.

What witness has rippled to you? From you? Raise your hand they said this weekend at the Regional Assembly, "Raise your hand if you are here because someone, somewhere taught you about Jesus." Ah, feel the ripple?

The Imagining

In this pasture of restoration of the soul the butterfly can teach us about imagining the possibilities of what we are meant to be.

In the cocoon, the caterpillar's organs completely liquefy (2 Corinthians 5:15 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come, the old has gone...)

If we opened the cocoon or chrysalis at that moment we would discover caterpillar soup. Yet within that content are certain cells known as imaginal discs that have survived this digestive process and have been in the caterpillar since it was developing in its egg.

These discs are the essence of possibility for the formation of wings, antennae, eyes, legs and all the body parts it will need as a mature butterfly.

Sometimes rarely, in the caterpillar's life these discs rise out of dormancy and tiny wings are actually secretly shaping, tucked inside their bodies though it is not outwardly apparent in any way.

So, here in the pasture, where our shepherd has led, we can imagine our soul's growing pains of our deepest purpose and possibility?

We are designed by a God who knew us before we were born and knit us together in our mother's womb.

Sometimes, I know, we have looked deeply at one another and almost detected the development of wings.

Sometimes, we have looked inward and absolutely know ourselves to be so much more than the necessary and even beautiful, belly-crawling existence of our wooly-wormness.

Sometimes, we have to journey deep inside our own soup, to hope and imagine what is promised.

The respect

And the last butterfly lesson is one of respect and patience as told in a story from **Zorba the Greek**, Nikos Kazantzakis:

One morning...I discovered a cocoon in the bark of a tree, just as the butterfly was making a hole in the case preparing to come out.

I waited a while, but it was too long appearing and I was impatient. I bent over it and breathed on it to warm it.

I warmed it quickly as I could and the miracle began to happen before my eyes, faster than life.

The case opened, the butterfly started slowly crawling out and I shall never forget my horror when I saw how its wings were folded back and crumpled. The wretched butterfly tried with its whole body to unfold them. Bending over it I tried to help it with my breath. In vain. It needed to be hatched out patiently and the unfolding of the wings should be a gradual process in the sun. Now it was too late...

The lesson that nature is teaching us is patience and respect for all created things. Even those we so desperately want to help.

Each of us
has in us
all we need to evolve.

As much of a struggle as it seems to be for the emerging butterfly, the wresting out of the cocoon builds the muscle that is necessary to work its new wings when it does finally emerge. And these are just the lessons of a tiny butterfly.

The Lighting:

Look at the artifacts you have brought today. Nature is our holy gift, the nursery of the children of God, our sacred mentor. Our Good Shepherd is leading us to her to nurture, delight and teach us. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. I can just imagine Jesus whistling to us to come on out!

There are gifts for us in the green pasture, beside the still waters and on this EARTH DAY, and in this stewardship season of overflowing, let us be shepherded to open and receive them. In thanksgiving we say, Amen.

Benediction:

A Gaelic Blessing:

Deep peace of the running wave to you.

Deep peace of the flowing air to you.

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.

Deep peace of the shining stars to you.

Deep peace of the gentle night to you.

Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.

Deep peace of Christ,

Of Christ the light of the world to you.

Deep peace of Christ to you.

Go in this peace.