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 Grace Episcopal Church
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In today's 2nd reading, Poet Wendell Berry commends us to abandon arrogance and stand in awe.

I was born in Arizona, in the Sonoran desert. The house we lived in when I was born was at the base of a mountain. The roads were dirt. Horses dusted about in the back yard.

When I was 10 my father moved out to the desert in Cave Creek, at that time, really, really remote, virgin desert, where neighbors were few and far between. Horny toads, tiny prehistoric monsters with horns who spit venom in your eye, sunned themselves in the dirt. Lizards zipped and shimmied under bushes. Sometimes rattle snakes announced themselves.

I was raised completely unchurched. But out in the vast desert at 10 years old, I experienced in awe for the first time, green barked Palo Verde trees and purple mountains. I felt an indebtedness to the creator of all this brilliant intricacy.

Wendell Berry writes in today's passage, "We must recover the sense of the majesty of creation, and the ability to be worshipful in its presence." Nature spoke to me of God's presence before I knew God. Nature inspired me to worship a God I did not yet know.

Scripture models this attention to nature. In Genesis 24, "*Isaac went out to the field one evening to meditate*" (Genesis 24:63 ESV)

In Jeremiah,

*"Blessed are those who trust in the LORD,
 whose trust is the LORD.
 They shall be like a tree planted by water,
 sending out its roots by the stream.*

*It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit. (Jeremiah 7:8)*

Did you ever have a childhood experience that impressed and humbled you? Has nature ever revealed the divine to you? Wendell Berry again, ‘we must learn to acknowledge that the creation is full of mystery; we will never entirely understand it’.

When I first arrived in Maine, I bought a used copy of the book *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* by Annie Dillard. Now, since collecting books and reading books are two different hobbies, I did not read it. That is, until a few weeks ago, when I picked it up.

I’m going to tell a story about this book that is going to sound like a string of coincidences. But I think it’s about the mystery of God.

So far, since I read 20 books at a time and never finish any of them, I think it is a book the author’s observations of the natural world. Like the Haiku we heard last week, the book is comprised of one vivid description after another. No plot that I can perceive, but I’m only half way through.

Early in the book the author, Annie Dillard, relates the childhood memory of a friend on Long Island, a man named Thomas McGonigle. Well, huh. My college friend Anna Saar is married to Thomas McGonigle. (He’s a bit older—we both like the oldies.)

Like me, Thomas is also drawn to the beauty of Arizona, and he and Anna (not to be confused with Annie Dillard) used to escape New York every winter and stay with me in Arizona.

So I read this passage relating Tom’s childhood memory, and I send Anna a picture of the passage, thinking, wow, cool coincidence. But Anna’s response was more somber. Anna

texted me that Tom was sad, because Annie Dillard has sort of fallen off the map and he couldn't reach her and he was worried about her health. This was a few weeks ago.

This week I learned Annie Dillard died on September 15th. A woman whose book I happened to be reading when she died, whose death I had a premonition of a few weeks before via Thomas. A book about being worshipful in the presence of Creation, a book essentially EXCLUSIVELY about the glory of creation, in passage after beautiful, descriptive passage.

A book I'm accidentally reading during the Season of Creation during the week in which Wendell Berry urges us to be present (only a few weeks after he himself died, a reading I chose weeks ago) in which Berry urges us to stand in awe, a week when I'm preaching in Grace Episcopal Church in Bath Maine,

where among Joseph's and my wedding guests almost 2 years ago were my friend Anna and her husband Thomas McGonigle, sitting and worshipping with us here at Grace. They stayed in Pam Mott's guest room.

I don't know the deeper meaning of these coincidences, only that life contains within it a beautiful synchronicity, as Karl Jung refers to it, the synchronicity of the universe we live in, rich with meaningful coincidences.

From Jung's book, *Synchronicity*, "these happenings are arranged as as if they were a dream of "a greater and more comprehensive consciousness, which is unknowable" (Scholz qtd in Jung, *Synchronicity*, 15). A comprehensive consciousness which is unknowable. Who does that remind you of? These synchronicities are signs of the God we worship drawing all things together in God.

In her book, Annie Dillard wonders how long it took for early humans to notice the regular recurrence of seasons on earth. This is important to us in Maine as we enter into Fall.

She writes, “Assuming that you hadn’t yet noticed any orderly progression of heavenly bodies, how long would you have to live on earth before you could feel with any assurance that any one particular long period of cold would, in fact, end?”

... ‘While the Earth remain at seed time and harvest and cold and heat and summer and winter and day at night shall not cease’: God makes this guarantee very early in Genesis to a people whose fears on this point had perhaps not been completely allayed” (Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, 74). To know seasons is to recognize the earth itself contains hope.

Wendell Berry again, “We must recover the sense of the majesty of creation, and the ability to be worshipful in its presence.”

It is easy to be distracted from the majesty of Creation in our current world, with rising authoritarianism, having reached the tipping point of global warming, war and the recently revealed apocalyptic threat of AI. This week I thought, from within my own fear, how do I pastor a parish through all this fear?

Well, I’ve been reading this book by Annie Dillard about the natural world. To behold beauty is to experience hope. For as long as we have breath and the ability to glance out the window or sit on the beach or walk on a trail or plant some flowers, we acknowledge the power of God in the world to create beauty.

We can take comfort in the synchronicity of the universe we live in, in meaningful coincidences as a sign that the God we worship is drawing all things together in God.

We can dwell in beauty in the Psalms. In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. In a book of Haiku or write our own.

We can remember that as women wept at the foot of the cross on Good Friday, Creation grieved with them when “from noon on darkness covered the whole land. . . [and] the earth shook, and the rocks were split” (Mt 27: 41, 51). In their deepest grief, they were unaware that Christ’s Resurrection was only hours away.

I'll close with some comfort from Wendell Berry in his poem, "The Peace of Wild Things".

*When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*