

## **Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

The Reverend Canon Sandra D. Richardson

RCL: Isaiah 49:8-16a; Psalm 131; 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; Matthew 6:24-34 LM: Isaiah 49:14-15; Psalm 62:2-3, 6-7, 8-9; 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; Matthew 6:24-34

God cares deeply for creation, and we can trust God fully in that care. Isaiah's Jubilee theme is very clear. God covenants not only "to establish the land [and] apportion the desolate heritages" (v. 8), but God also offers release to prisoners, light to those in darkness, food and water to those who hunger and thirst. "The Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones" (v. 13).

Matthew 6 and Psalm 62 call us to not be anxious and to trust God. The passage from Matthew was a reading for Morning Prayer in the first week of a two-week silent retreat I attended at Emery House of St. John the Evangelist in West Newbury, Massachusetts. The hermitage has a sunroom with long windows looking out into the woods. If I put my rocking chair just right, I could look to the right and see the Artichoke River and to the left the Merrimac River, much farther away.

In the silence of the late April days preceding this reading, I observed the birds, squirrels, tall trees, and geese, and noticed the greening of plants and trees. There were several rainy and windy days during which I noticed the very tall trees bending and swaying. I thought of their pliability and how they did not break.

On one of these days, I read about bending from Howard Thurman's *Deep Is the Hunger*. Thurman talks about trees bending to have life, sustained by the sturdy growth from which they come. "The tree seems to say to the branches, 'Bend with the wind but do not release your hold, and you can ride out any storm.'" <sup>1</sup> Thurman explores how this image relates to compromise in human life. He says: "A man does not make a compromise in a given situation; he merely adjusts. . . . A careful examination of any man's life would reveal that, at one point he bends with the wind and keeps on living, while at another point he defies the wind and is quite prepared to be brought crashing to the ground." <sup>2</sup>

Tall trees are pliable and adjust to the wind. Animals have survival instincts that are very strong. These seem to be more innate to nature than humanity. Is it the anxiety chemicals in our systems that cause us to not be pliable and bend with less anxiety?

I pondered God's making animal and plant life and how dependent they are on each other. Walks through nearby Maudsley State Park exhibited so much coming to life as God's creation celebrated spring. As the weeks went by, more life would appear, and then it would be fall and resting time for many plants and vegetation. Yet winter is the heyday for the firs and other evergreen trees and plants.

Birds and squirrels take pollen and seeds to other places, providing growth and fertilization that ultimately provides food for other creatures. All that the squirrels and birds needed was there for

them. They didn't worry. They scampered from tree to tree and through the woods in the fullness of life. Baby squirrels were learning to make their way. If God was taking care of them, why was I to worry so about my own life?

Examples of some questions to explore are:

- How do we learn to make our way?
- How do we help others to make their way and provide for them?
- How do we show others to make their way?
- How do we find ways to lessen their worries and our worries?

As we observe animals meeting their needs from their surroundings, how can we better use the God-given abilities, talents, and resources of a wealthy nation so that no person in our community is hungry, that there is adequate healthcare, insurance, and medicines, adequate housing and jobs, and a decent quality of life? Share examples of how this is happening in your community and how members of your church are involved.

Ask questions about times when people have been anxious. Share some examples from your own life and from anxious times that the congregation has experienced. Encourage the congregation to reflect on how particular people affected their lives when they were worried, anxious, down and out. How did that make a difference? Give examples of how to transfer this to an awareness of others' needs and a willingness to help them.

#### *Children's Time*

Talk about nature—plants and animals. If this is a community without a lot of wooded areas, then refer to a park or wooded area that they might know. Ask how they see squirrels, birds, and rabbits getting food in their yards. Talk about how God takes care of nature, how plentiful food is provided, how rain helps growth, the need for sunlight.

Ask them about how they learned to ride a bike, swim, etc., and the anxieties they may have experienced. Let them share how they became less anxious.

#### *Musical Suggestions*

I want to walk as a child of the light—EH 490 Christ, whose glory fills the skies—EH 7 Morning has broken—EH 8 Not here for high and holy things—EH 9, vv. 1, 4, 5, 6 Holy Spirit, ever living—EH 511 Come down, O love divine—EH 516 Surely it is God who saves me—EH 678, 679.

If the choir has Jack Noble White's "The First Song of Isaiah," that could be sung with the congregation doing the refrains.

1. Howard Thurman, *Deep Is the Hunger* (Richmond, Ind.: Friends United Press, 1978) 12.
2. *Ibid.*, 13, 14.