

September 6, 2015

This is the Day that the Lord Has Made

Musical Prelude

Greeting: excerpt from W.S. Merwin's 'A Momentary Creed'

First Hymn: How Can I keep From Singing, Green 245

Readings: The Summer Day, Mary Oliver; Psalm 118:24

Second Hymn: This is Holy Ground, Green 152

Joys and Concerns

Musical Interlude

Prayer

Third Hymn: Simple Gifts, Blue 46 (alternate second verse on printed page)

Message: This is the Day that the Lord has Made

Silent Worship

Fourth Hymn: This is my Father's World, Green 29

Benediction: e.e. cummings 'Thank You God'

Afterthoughts/Introductions/Announcements

Musical Postlude

Welcome

Good morning Friends. W.S. Merwin wrote, in his poem, *A Momentary Creed*,

*I believe in the ordinary day
that is here at this moment and is me...*

*there is no place I know outside today
except for the unknown all around me*

*the only presence that appears to stay
everything that I call mine it lent me*

even the way that I believe the ordinary day

Today we are given the mystery, miracle, and gift of one more ordinary day. Let us together start our celebration of this day by singing.

First Hymn: How Can I keep From Singing, Green 245

Readings

Psalm 118:24, ESV This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

THE SUMMER DAY

Who made the world?

Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper?

This grasshopper, I mean--

the one who has flung herself out of the grass,

the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,

who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down--

*who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
With your one wild and precious life?*

Second Hymn This is Holy Ground, Green 152

Joys and Concerns

Prayer

Holy One, we don't always know how to pray. We don't always know what a prayer is, or who you are. But we kneel, in spirit, before you. We move through our lives wanting to attend to your world, your Creation, to each blade of grass, each grasshopper or grandchild or grandparent. It is hard to pay attention. It sometimes feels like work to know how to simply be blessed. To be present, and blessed. So we ask you today to bless us, please, Sacred Giver of Life, You who Give Us This Day, You Who Number our Days, help us to know that there is no day in which you do not dwell. Walk with us through this one. Dwell with us, that we may know peace, that we may be graced by the presence of the Holy in the difficult ordinariness of now, in the fields of the daily you have given for us to plow. Bless us, dear Lord, that we may come to believe in this ordinary day you have made.

Third Hymn: Simple Gifts, with alternate verse, Blue 46

Message: This the day Lord has made.

Silent Worship

Fourth Hymn: This is My Father's World, Green 29

Benediction: e.e. cummings

*I thank You God for most this amazing
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes*

*(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth
day of life and of love and wings: and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)*

*how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any—lifted from the no
of all nothing—human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?*

*(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)*

Message

I grew up hearing today's reading from Psalm 118 more than any other scriptural verse. My father invoked this verse nearly every day. He wrote it on a white board that is on the refrigerator, he said it with gusto on holidays. With September upon us, and August once again behind us, I have been reflecting on this scriptural passage, and on the passage of time, on the long succession of ordinary days that the Lord has made and which we are given to live. Each year, the month of August seems to go by more and more quickly. As the garden ripened and reddened and browned, and as the cicadas sang their dry song of late summer, there came an urgency to the still long days and the lingering twilight took on a feeling of portent.

August seemed to say “cherish this. Fall is coming.” And now here we are, in September once again, turning toward the fall equinox in a couple weeks.

So my message today is about the summer that is coming to a close. This summer, my seven year old son Cyrus said three things that I would like to share with you today. One in June, one in July, and one in August, marking the time of the summer months, his words have converged in a message that I share with his permission, about the gift and the challenge of each ordinary day the Lord has made.

In June, which you may remember was extremely wet and very good for growing weeds, one Sunday afternoon we were all home together. The boys were playing kickball in the yard, I was weeding in the garden, and George was weedwacking around the perimeter of the garden, with his trusty old weedwacker, which could be finicky and tend to stall out and need to be wrestled into restarting. So it stalled, and George brought it into the barn to tinker with it, and suddenly I heard a sort of unassuming pop, followed immediately by a shout. and then I saw George running toward the house. I straightened up and I saw a fire. The weedwacker had exploded, George had flung it into the weeds behind the barn, and there followed, maybe five minutes of very urgent completely on task emergency maneuvers by George and I to put the fire out using water in buckets from the house spigot and from our big rain catchment barrels on the other side of the barn. we were, for those moments, totally in sync, totally at one with the work of putting out the fire. The boys stood by and watched, entranced, solemn almost, eyes huge, attentive witnesses to the unfolding drama consuming our family unit. It was my last splooshing bucket that finally and forcefully doused the fire, for which I continue to be something of a minor hero. And as the twisted black smelly burnt weedwacker smoked and sizzled, and we all absorbed what had just happened, there was a silent moment, all of us standing around the blackened, wet place where the fire had just been, blinking and catching our breath and looking at each other. And then Cyrus said: “I wish something like that would happen every day.”

This is the day that the Lord has made, but sometimes, Cyrus confessed, he just wants a little more. Just a little more excitement, a minor emergency that everyone rallies around, a little adrenaline but not too much, a happy ending, no injuries, a

good story to remember and the experience of a moment of utter unity of purpose, and that sometimes elusive sense of aliveness. Dear Lord send a little excitement to spice up the day you have made, because to be honest, despite its miraculous goodness, sometimes it is hard to simply rejoice and be glad in it. I think Cyrus was acknowledging the pull of wanting more than the ordinary and regular. He was admitting the challenge of being satisfied and glad of what we have been given. It seems like something our culture struggles with. It is certainly something that resonated with me.

And yet at any moment we can stop and notice the day we are in, as Mary Oliver so beautifully reminds us. And that is what Cyrus next observed. In July, the crickets were really getting going, the night sounds were hitting their summer stride. We were sitting on the deck in the long summer dusk, watching the fireflies wake up and flicker on, and I was trying to help my family to hear amongst the evening birdcalls, the song of the wood thrush, one of my favorites, who sings especially in the early morning and evening. We were very quiet for a moment. The crickets played their leg violins, the wood thrush fluted. I said “there! that one!” We listened. And Cyrus said, into the hush filled with sounds, “Wow, if you get really quiet you can hear alot.” Although we may struggle with the allure of and desire for more, a little more, a little more excitement, a little something else, the explosion interjected into each day, we also can stop at any time and listen. In the quiet the world speaks. Silence itself has a voice, sometimes a multitude of voices. There are things to be heard, things to be listened to, that can only be heard by getting quiet. Sometimes the voice behind all voices whispers, and you can only hear it if you are quiet enough. In the midst of everything that consumes each precious day we have been given, in the midst of these wild and precious lives, filled with ordinary days, and ordinary busy-ness, sometimes if you get really quiet, you can hear alot. sometimes that can be a kind of prayer, that paying attention, when we are, for a moment, as Mary Oliver put it, idle and blessed.

Which brings us to August, when one lazy Sunday, our family sitting in the shade in the grass, idle and blessed, not doing much in particular, Cyrus said into the laziness, “Mommy, you know, this is the only time this day is going to happen.”

And with that, in the languid urgency of August, my son's summer words came full circle. June, July, August, he gave voice to the particular challenge and gift of the typical day. He spoke of the pull of wanting more, more excitement to spice up the long haul of our ordinary time. He observed that stopping and listening yields songs we might otherwise miss. And at last he said what is always true. So far as we know, this day, even as it arises, is passing away, and will never happen again. This is it. The one time we get to live September 6, 2015.

So that was our summer. Beautiful, irreplaceable days full of ordinary moments, chores, the occasional explosion, momentary stillness and stopping to listen, restlessness, and utter aliveness. All of it together in the ordinary day that the Lord has made.

Perhaps the ancient voice calling to us from this Psalm acknowledges the common human lament that it is actually no small task, no easy spiritual practice to rejoice and be glad. E.B. White once confessed “*I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve the world and a desire to enjoy the world. This makes it hard to plan the day.*” I can really relate to that sentiment. I am compelled to notice all that cries out in need of change in our world. Right now, at this moment, there is unspeakable violence and tragic deprivation and a Creation in peril. It is difficult indeed to rejoice and be glad in this day that carries with it great suffering and great need of change for many on Earth.

And so together we get quiet. We hear summer and fall having a conversation. We notice the light changing. There is prayer at work in stopping to listen, in paying attention, in kneeling in the grass, in noticing the day that the Lord has made. At the end of her poem, at the end of this summer, Mary Oliver asks the question for all of us, the question that is at the heart of E.B. White’s confession, and the question that lingers around the edges of Psalm 118. How ought we to spend this one day? She writes: “Tell me, what else should I have done? Doesn’t everything die at last, and too soon? Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”

This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.