

WGUMC April 23, 2017 God in Creation
"Consider the Lilies" Matthew 6:25-34

I was running the dog at Calero County Park on Wednesday when I came upon several groups of seniors out for a hike on a beautiful day. As I passed one gentleman, he asked me if it was my car in the parking lot that had all the bumper stickers. I said, "yes." He asked me if I was a Methodist [I have a UMC license plate holder]. I said, "yes." He said that he goes to Los Gatos UMC and asked me which church I go to. I said, "Willow Glen." He asked me if I knew Tom and Stephanie Theaker. I said, "Yes, they are my parishioners." He said, "I'm Stephanie's Uncle Jim. Tell her I said hello."

It's no surprise to me that you will find other Methodists out on the trails in the morning. What better way to get to know the Creator than to get out and explore the Creation? Not only that, but it's a great place to ponder the significance of the resurrection. What you have to understand is that Jesus did not come back to his former life on Easter Sunday. That

would be resuscitation. But he became the source of new life, and that is the central meaning of the resurrection. And one of the best places to gather evidence of the new creation, I believe, is in the explosion of life that happens every spring in this old creation.

So on these several Sundays after Easter, I wanted to share with you some reflections on what nature can teach us about the nature of God. As it says in the Song of Songs: "Come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come..." [Song 2:10-12]

I wish that I could have come away to see the Super bloom in Southern California this year. It started off with a bang in Anza Borrego Desert State Park and then moved north into the Central Valley and the Carrizo Plain National Monument. You could even track it by satellite, and from the pictures I saw surely Solomon in all his glory never looked this good.

It's gratifying but not all that surprising that a super bloom would follow our super duper drought. That's because invasive species don't fare as well as native plants during long dry spells. So when the rains finally do come, the native flowers don't have much competition.

You see, the seeds of those native species have been lying in wait, sometimes for decades. They have a protective coating on them that keeps them fertile for a very long time. It washes off only when just the right amount of rain falls. That keeps the plant from growing in years when there is some but not enough water to sustain seed production. And that's how life survives in a landscape that would seem to be more conducive to death.

When I look at the amazing photos of the Super Bloom of 2017, I think of those seeds waiting for just the right time to burst and it makes me wonder whether patient desert flowers

could teach impatient people something about God's sense of timing.

On the one hand, God is eternal. God is timeless. So there is no right or wrong time in God because there is no time in God. On the other hand, all time is in God. Everything—past, present and future—is right now with God. So, even during years of brutal drought, in the mind of God, the desert is blooming. Because what is only potential in nature is fully actual in God.

And that is super good news for us. For we may think we are wilting, dying, dried up and about to blow away, but God sees the seeds that are lying dormant in our dust. Some of those seeds have been there for decades. But they are not dead. God sees the flower we can't see, the super bloom we are waiting to be.

Now we don't live in the desert, and we won't see a super bloom like that here. Our flowers are less stunning maybe, but

still delightful. I have really enjoyed walking in our hills and forests and finding wildflowers in all kinds of nooks and crannies. Every flower has its favorite place. Poppies and Ithuriel's Spear both love a sunny hillside. Wild iris and blue bonnets prefer to grow in partial shade. Columbine likes the creeksides and ceanothus grows in the sand. So I find it hard not to see God just about everywhere this time of year.

Makes me wonder why we ever think we can locate God in certain places, like churches. All we have to do is get outside and let the incredible beauty of Creation tell us that God is in fact all around us. God has no place because God is everywhere. And if we can stop worrying that there is somehow more God over there than over here, we are going to be much happier. Wildflowers whether we find them in a pristine wilderness or along a busy freeway in San Jose, remind me that love and beauty can grow anywhere. And if this is where God plants us, everything we are going to need is right here. As Jesus says,

"If God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will God not much more clothe you—you of little faith?"

I like the lilies of the field, but I have to say that one of my favorite places to look for flowers is in a redwood forest. And one of my favorite forest flowers is *Trillium ovatum*, or western trillium or, even more poetic, western wakerobin. It is a member of the lily family and it has three leaves and one flower with three petals, so, of course, I immediately think of our three-in-one God. There are so many three's in nature: three dimensions in space; three divisions of earth; three laws of motion; three primary colors; three states of water. Could it be that they are all reflections of the Trinity?

To tell you the truth, I'm not that into numerology. But one thing that the three-fold nature of God does tell me is this: in the heart of God, at the center of God's being, there is community: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Everything in Creation

reflects the Creator and in some way bears the stamp of Trinity.

I am reminded of that every time I stumble upon this lily.

The wakerobin simply could not survive apart from its forest community. It is utterly dependent on other species for both protection and reproduction. It needs the shade of trees to grow because it can't tolerate direct sunlight. And it needs the assistance of insects to reproduce: beetles, moths, and bumblebees to pollinate the flowers; ants and wasps to disperse the seeds. So it truly takes a community to produce this symbol of the Trinity.

When I walk in the woods and come upon a *Trillium ovatum* I remember that we, too, are made in the image of the Trinity. By that I mean that we all need community. That's why we opened the Village House, to create a place for community. When we all come together and love one another, we truly reflect God's purpose for the whole creation.

Therefore, I tell you, let the wildflowers teach you not to worry about your life. Just learn their lessons. Consider the desert flowers and how they wait to grow and remember that God has a time for you. Consider the forest flowers and where they grow and remember that God has a place for you. And then consider the lily in the forest and the community that helps it grow and remember that God has a purpose for you.

If Jesus looked to the birds of the air and the lilies of the field to find wisdom for life and freedom from worry, so can we. But there's no need to feel sad when the super bloom is over. The seeds will wait for another spring. And even though the grass will wither and the flower will fade, the word of our God stands forever. [Isaiah 40:8]